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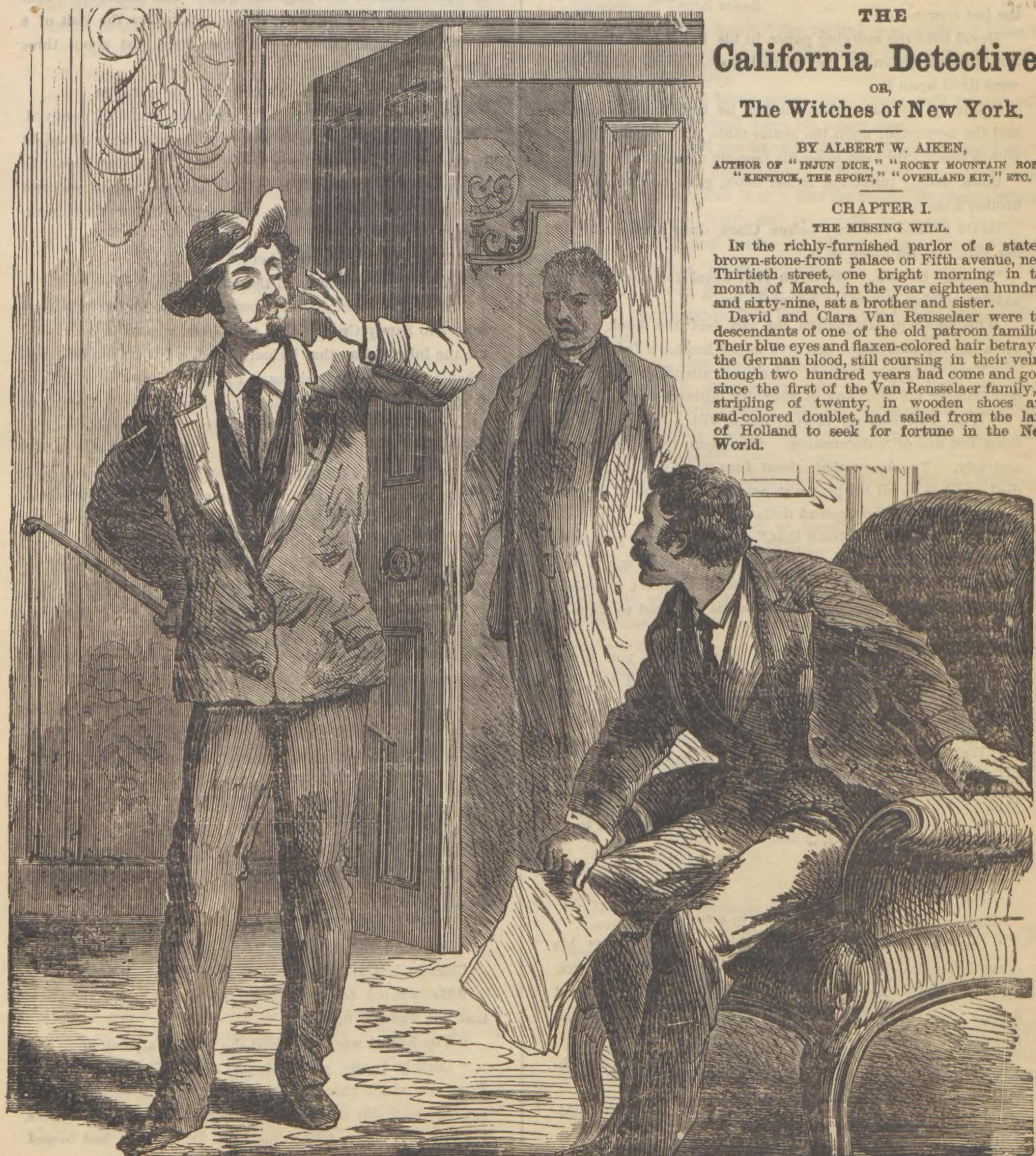
Vol. IV.

Complete
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THE California Detective; OR, The Witches of New York.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "INJUN DICK," "ROCKY MOUNTAIN ROB,"
"KENTUCK, THE SPORT," "OVERLAND KIT," ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE MISSING WILL.

IN the richly-furnished parlor of a stately brown-stone-front palace on Fifth avenue, near Thirtieth street, one bright morning in the month of March, in the year eighteen hundred and sixty-nine, sat a brother and sister.

David and Clara Van Rensselaer were the descendants of one of the old patroon families. Their blue eyes and flaxen-colored hair betrayed the German blood, still coursing in their veins, though two hundred years had come and gone since the first of the Van Rensselaer family, a stripling of twenty, in wooden shoes and sad-colored doublet, had sailed from the land of Holland to seek for fortune in the New World.

The German lad of stolid face and plodding brain built up a fortune, a family, and left to his heirs a princely estate.

The family of Van Rensselaer flourished like a green bay tree, and, like the tree, it branched forth.

Philip Van Rensselaer, the father of David and Clara, and one of the descendants of the old patroon, had died just four years before the time at which our story commences. To his children he had left an ample fortune.

David Van Rensselaer was five and twenty years of age, his sister two years younger.

David was a handsome fellow, with his clear-cut, resolute features—still betraying the impress that the stolid German lad had given his descendants—and his crisp-curling yellow hair, and keen blue eyes; just about the medium size in height, and with a form which gave promise of fine physical strength.

Clara, his sister, was a beautiful blonde; the only blemish to her beauty was the lack of life—of animation in her face. Her features were too regular—too much of the wax-doll and too little of the woman.

The girl sat by the window in a low easy-chair, reading the last new novel.

David held the morning paper in his hand, but his attention was not given to the printed page, although his eyes were fixed upon it.

Suddenly, with a restless motion, he rose from his seat, laid the newspaper upon the center-table, and paced slowly, with a thoughtful look upon his face, up and down the room.

Clara, deeply interested in her book, gave no heed to her brother's movement.

David paused suddenly before Clara, drew a chair up to her side, and sat down in it.

"Clara," he said, "lay down your novel for a moment; I have something important to say to you."

With an air of resignation the girl laid the book down upon her lap and raised her eyes to her brother's face.

"Very well," she replied; "I am all attention, but please don't bother me with any of your dry business details."

"What I have to say to you, Clara, will, I fear, prove any thing but dry or uninteresting. Now then, listen to me attentively. You know that, about four years ago, our father died and left us all his property, amounting, in round figures, to about a hundred thousand dollars?"

"Why, of course I know that," the girl replied, pettishly. "Didn't I wear mourning for nearly a year, although it was dreadfully unbecoming to me? Of course I don't complain of it, for when one loses a father, one is expected to show a proper degree of sorrow."

"You know that? Now, I am going to tell you something that you don't know. Our father left us all his property—a hundred thousand dollars; that is, the law gave it to us as his only heirs, as he left no will."

"Well, I know that too," said the girl, quickly. "I'm sure you and the lawyers explained all that to me long ago. Why do you wish to revive the matter?"

"Wait," David said, quietly. "The property came to us because there was no will."

"Yes."

"But there was a will."

Clara opened her blue eyes wide in astonishment.

"Our father left a will behind him. A year after his death I found a draft of it among some of his old papers. That was three years ago. The will gives fifty thousand dollars to us, and fifty thousand to one Alice Gordon Van Rensselaer, his eldest child."

"His eldest child?" exclaimed the girl, in utter astonishment.

"Yes; our father was married twice. We are the children of his second wife. This Alice, the child spoken of in

the will, is the child of his first wife, whom he married secretly at a little country village called Sandy Creek, in the upper part of this State. I discovered all this from some old letters that were tied up with the draft of the will. The child Alice is not known as Van Rensselaer, but by her mother's family name of Gordon. There was some dark mystery connected with our father's first marriage, or he would not have so carefully concealed it from the world."

"And you discovered all this three years ago?" Clara asked, in wonder.

"Yes."

"But you never said a word about it."

"But I acted, though," David replied, with a quiet smile. "The moment I discovered the existence of the will, and of the child Alice, I consulted a private detective officer—one Mr. Sharpe, whose office was on Broadway. I employed him to find out all the particulars concerning the girl."

"But I never heard of this before."

"No; I kept the affair secret. The detective dispatched a messenger to Sandy Creek, with instructions to find out all the particulars concerning the girl. The messenger went and returned. By the way, do you remember the visit of a certain gentleman called Royal Keene here, just about three years ago?"

A flush swept over Clara's cheek at the question.

"Of course I remem'ber it," she replied, evidently annoyed. "The dissipated wretch looked as if he had slept all night in the gutter. He was very saucy too. Said that I was the cause of his ruin—that I loved his father's fortune and not him, and had discarded him because his father died bankrupt."

"That was his last visit here?"

"Yes; I have never seen the horrid wretch since."

"Well, that same Royal Keene was the detective's messenger to Sandy Creek. His visit here was to deliver unto me the information that he had gained. I was thunderstruck when I learned his business. From his knowledge of our family affairs, the information he gained at Sandy Creek put him in possession of the important secret that there was another heir to the Van Rensselaer estate. The knowledge which accident had thus thrown in his way he proposed to use as a weapon against us. Fortune plays strange tricks sometimes in this world. This Keene had been picked up out of the gutter by the detective officer, Sharpe, who had been well acquainted with his father. Out of charity he employed him, so as to keep him out of the poor-house. Thinking my business of little importance, he had sent him on it, and thus placed in his hands a terrible weapon."

"But all this was three years ago and he has never made use of his knowledge," Clara said.

"Simply because I beat him at his own game," David replied, in his cold, quiet way. "He was willing to sell the secret cheap, or rather sell his silence concerning it. He had an idea that the marriage of our father and mother was not legal; I confess I can not understand why he should have had any such idea, but he had; and as he supposed our father had died without leaving a will, by producing this girl he could rob us of all our fortune. What price do you suppose he asked?"

"I can't guess," Clara replied.

"Ten thousand dollars and your hand in marriage."

Clara looked at her brother in blank amazement.

"He wanted to marry you, and thus revenge the slight that you had put upon him."

"The horrid wretch!" cried the girl, in a passion.

"Luckily I was prepared for him. The same turn of Fortune's wheel which gave the precious information to him, gave to me a slip of paper—a draft for a hundred dollars, bearing my name, which he in a drunken fit had forged.

He borrowed a small sum of money from a Jew diamond-broker on Broadway, and deposited the draft as security, promising to redeem it in a certain time. The Jew guessed that the check was worthless, but thought that, rather than run the risk of being accused of forgery, Keene would take it up. He failed to do so, and the Jew brought the draft to me. He knew that Keene had been intimate with me, and thought that I would be glad to cover up the consequence of his folly. Of course I readily bought the precious slip of paper. So you see I had two weapons to use against him. First, the draft of our father's will—he, of course, thinking that I had the will itself in my possession, and could produce it at any moment. That proved that we could retain half the property, even if the girl was brought forward. Second, the forged draft. We came to a speedy understanding, and I visited his rooms that night. I used my wits and succeeded in gaining possession of the two important papers concerning the heir which he had secured at Sandy Creek; a record of baptism and the marriage certificate of the mother. I left Keene in a drunken stupor on the floor, and that very night the shanty caught fire and burned to the ground."

"And this wretch, Keene?" asked the girl.

"Perished in the flames!" David replied. "When I arrived at home the same evening, I immediately burned the two papers that I had secured, thus destroying all chance of the girl ever being able to prove her identity."

"But if our father made a will, who has it?" Clara asked.

"That is a question that has puzzled me for three years. If the will was in existence, why should any one hesitate to produce it, our father being dead and his estate settled up?"

"I can't guess."

"The answer to the question came this very morning."

Clara looked bewildered.

"This morning?" she said, astonished.

"Yes; that is the reason why I have spoken about the matter. Affairs are getting serious, sister; the chances are ten to one that we shall lose half of our property."

"How dreadful!" Clara exclaimed.

"Not a pleasant prospect, truly; the time has come, though, when we must prepare ourselves for the struggle."

"You do not intend to give up half of our fortune, do you, David?" Clara asked, in a dismal, helpless sort of way.

"Not if I can help it," he replied, his keen, blue eyes gleaming. "Two points are in our favor: first, the heir may be dead—'tis three years since I heard of her; second, we are in possession, and possession is nine points of the law. But in order that you shall fully understand the situation, listen while I read."

CHAPTER II.

THE CALIFORNIA DETECTIVE.

DAVID drew a letter from his pocket. Clara then remembered that he had received it that very morning.

Van Rensselaer opened the letter and read it aloud:

"MY DEAR SIR:

"I am an old friend of your father, and have been absent in India for five years. On my return I found at my home in Buffalo a package addressed to me by your father. On opening it I found that it contained his will, with a request that I should produce it at his death, which, he further added, I might expect to hear of at any moment. This letter, you must remember, was written to me by your father nearly five years ago, and has remained at my home in Buffalo, waiting my return. This fact, you will perceive, accounts for the long delay. I sincerely regret it. I shall be in New York, via the Hudson River Railway, Wednesday afternoon. Should be pleased to meet you at the depot, as I am quite a stranger in the city. I inclose carta. Yours respectfully,

"ELIJAH HARTRIGHT."

"Why, how strange!" exclaimed Clara; "it seems more like a romance than a reality."

"Truth is stranger than fiction," David answered. "You see the mystery regarding the will is explained now. Our father evidently feared that, in the event of his sudden death, I might find the will and destroy it; so he sent it to his old friend."

"It will be horrid to give up the money," Clara said, reflectively.

"Yes, but we have not given it up yet," the brother replied, meaningly; "nor do I intend to without a struggle."

"That's right; think of some way to retain it. Why, David, I should really feel poor with only fifty thousand dollars."

A ring at the door-bell interrupted the conversation.

Clara rose languidly.

"That must be Adolphus," she said. "He promised to escort me down town this morning."

"Lawrence, eh? By the by, Clara, are you in love with Lawrence?" David asked.

"I really don't know," she replied, doubtfully; "I don't know whether I am or not. He's very rich, or his father is—it's the same thing."

"Yes, you had better secure him, Clara; he'll have about two hundred thousand when his father dies."

"Oh, there will not be any difficulty about securing him," Clara answered, confidently. "Whenever he hasn't any thing else to say and is at a loss for words, he always offers me his hand and heart, and then tells me what a beautiful pair of long-tailed ponies he brought from Europe," and with a wry face, she left the room.

David leaned his cheek upon his hand, and with contracted brows, gazed upon the open letter that he held within his grasp.

"The old man must be robbed of the will," he murmured, slowly, communing with himself; "the precious paper must be destroyed; and yet my agency in the affair must not appear—must not even be suspected. How can it be accomplished?"

Thoughtfully the young man pondered over the difficult question.

"By Jove!" he cried, at length, "I have it! I have solved the riddle. I'll get some cool, sharp fellow to meet him at the depot, tell him that I have gone out of town, and take him to a hotel. When he is fairly housed, I'll think of further action. That will shall never see the light of a probate court."

A servant entered the room with a card on a salver.

Van Rensselaer read the name:

"James Bright, California."

"The gemman's at the door, sar," the servant said.

"James Bright," David said, reflectively. "I don't know any one by that name. Did he say that he wished to see me in person?"

"Yes, sar; on very 'ticular business, sar."

"Show him in, then."

"Yes, sar."

The servant withdrew.

"What the deuce can this Mr. Bright want with me, I wonder?" David said, as he awaited his visitor.

The servant conducted the stranger into the room; then withdrew and closed the door behind him.

Mr. James Bright was a man apparently about thirty years of age, with an oval, Italian sort of face, a quick black eye, high cheek-bones, and a square-set, resolute chin. He was dressed in a dark velvet suit, a white sombrero pulled carelessly over his brows, and a fragrant "Henry Clay" cigar between his regular, white teeth.

The whole appearance of the man was cool, careless, reckless—a fair type of the modern Californian, the child of the Sierras, of the rocky gulch and stone-ribbed canyon.

"Good-morning, sir," said the Californian, gracefully, removing the cigar from between his teeth and pouring forth a volume of smoke.

Van Rensselaer started to his feet in utter amazement; his face was white—the blood had forsaken the cheeks, and his eyes glared as if he gazed upon a specter rather than on a human like to himself.

The Californian never noticed the agitation of the other, but placed his cigar again between his teeth and was speedily enveloping himself in a cloud of smoke.

"That face—those eyes!" muttered Van Rensselaer, in utter bewilderment; "the very voice too. Can the dead have returned to life? It is not possible." With a powerful effort he roused himself from his stupor. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, aloud, addressing his visitor. "Your name is Bright?"

"James Bright, late of Calaveras county, California," replied the stranger, bowing politely.

Again the familiar voice struck on the astonished ear of Van Rensselaer.

"It can not be," he muttered, with a nervous motion, pushing back the flaxen curls that clustered on his brow. "It is but a strong resemblance. You wish to see me, sir?" he said, again addressing the Californian.

"Yes, I've come some little distance expressly to see you," the stranger replied.

"Come some little distance?"

"A trifle—about three thousand miles," Mr. Bright said, carelessly.

"You have some business with me, then?"

"You bet!" replied the stranger, tersely.

"Explain your business, sir."

"Hadn't you better ask a fellow to take a chair in your ranch, David?"

Van Rensselaer started as though he had received an electric shock. If the stranger had stricken him in the face he could not have astonished him more than by the simple utterance of his name.

"It is he," he muttered, beneath his breath; "by some strange chance of fortune he escaped from the cage of fire. He lives to call me to a reckoning."

"Are you talking to yourself or to me?" asked the Californian, between two great puffs of smoke.

"You are no stranger to me!" cried Van Rensselaer, suddenly.

"Of course not; haven't I introduced myself? Got my card in your paw now."

"Oh! I know you!" cried Van Rensselaer, fiercely, an evil light shining in his eyes.

"Of course you do; James Bright, late of Calaveras county California, ex-lawyer, ex-actor, and present detective officer."

"But I can call you by another name!" Van Rensselaer exclaimed.

"That is very likely."

"You are Royal Keene!"

"Oh, am I?" and the Californian looked at the New Yorker with an expression of wonder upon his face.

"Deception is useless; I recognize you although you have changed greatly. You are the man I take you for."

"Now, don't ask me any questions because I hate to tell lies," said the stranger, coolly; "but, since you are really so anxious to know who and what I am, I'll corral a chair and talk to you." And even as he spoke the Californian coolly wheeled an easy-chair to the side of the center-table and sat down in it, still, however, keeping his hat upon his head and his cigar alight.

His mission was not one of peace, and he openly showed the signs of hostility.

Van Rensselaer, leaning upon the back of one of the large chairs, his face deadly pale, save where a hectic fever-spot burned in either cheek, awaited the speech of explanation.

"As you have guessed—for between you and I, I think that you are about the most sagacious gentleman that I have ever seen—you and I are old acquaintances," began the stranger, in his cool, easy way; "I won't say friends, because I don't really think that there was ever much friendship between us. Three years ago I was a poor miserable devil. I'll tell you how I became so; how a Harvard student became a drunken lawyer. You and I were chums together at college; those days over, in the city we were apparently fast friends. I was your sister's lover, an accepted one too. Then my father died. Like many another man who has held up his head high in this great city, he died almost a beggar. His splendid income he had spent as fast as he had received it. I woke one morning and found myself master of just one thousand dollars and no more. Foolishly I confided the truth to you—told you how small was the sum that I possessed. Friend-like you suggested a way to increase the sum. You plied me with liquor, then took me to a gaming-room on Twenty-third street. I hadn't any idea then that you, the wealthy, aristocratic David Van Rensselaer, was a silent partner in that gilded hell. When morning came I left that house a ruined man—a drunken beggar. Ten hours after you coolly informed me that, as I was penniless, I was no match for your sister, and that henceforth we must be as strangers to each other. From that moment I went down the ladder of degradation rapidly—champagne gave place to whisky, the fashionable club-room to the corner grocery. I managed to keep myself from starvation by pleading for the poor devils—even more wretched than myself—who were brought up before the Tombs Police Court. Then Fortune threw a chance for vengeance in my way; I got hold of certain papers concerning your estate. You came to my house for those papers. Again you played the rogue. You dosed me with drugged brandy, then stole the papers; in stealing them you took a human life—that of my poor companion, O'Kale; he detected you in your crime and you struck him down like a dog. Through a crack in the wall, drugged as I was, I witnessed the tragedy, saw your knife crimsoned with his blood. Then to cover up your crime you set fire to the empty store below; you intended that both I and your senseless victim should perish in the flames. It was a scheme worthy of your heart of iron, but Heaven willed that I should escape. That happened just three years ago, and for these three years, day by day, almost hour by hour, have I thought of vengeance. The time has come at last. I have returned to New York to place the hangman's noose around your neck."

CHAPTER III.

THE ACTRESS AT HOME.

IN the front room of a modest little two-story brick house on Twenty-second street, near Sixth avenue, a tall young girl was pacing up and down, an open book in her hand.

She was very pretty with her large, clear, gray-blue eyes, her golden-brown hair and her pure red and white complexion.

There was a sad look, though, to the fair young face, and once in a while a vacant expression in the lustrous eyes, which betrayed that there was something wanting to complete the girl's happiness.

She was dressed in a plain calico, with a white collar and dainty cuffs.

The room was plainly furnished, but the little pictures hung here and there upon the walls, and the little ornaments upon the mantelpiece, lent an air of refinement to the humble apartment.

The girl was Coralie, the actress. Coralie York as she called herself in private life; the last new face on the metropolitan boards.

The girl was roused from her study by a lively rap at the door, and a pert voice, full of life and spirit, cried out:

"May I come in? It's only Katie!"

And without waiting for permission, the door flew open, and a pretty black-eyed, black-haired girl of eighteen or twenty, dressed in a magnificent walking-dress, danced into the apartment.

Coralie laid down her book, and, with a sweet smile on her innocent face, advanced to meet her visitor.

"Just like me; always disturbing you in your studies! What a regular nuisance I must be!" the new-comer exclaimed.

"Why, Katie, how can you say such a thing?" Coralie said, in wonder.

"Lord bless you! I'm capable of saying any thing," replied the other.

"But, lay aside your hat and sit down, won't you?" the actress asked.

"I've come on purpose to spend the whole afternoon with you," responded the visitor, removing the dainty hat and flinging it, carelessly, upon the snow-white counterpane of the bed.

The black-eyed little lady demands a brief notice at our hands.

Katie Blake, a daughter of the Emerald Isle, was better known, however, to the world at large as Mademoiselle Heloise, the famous French danseuse, one of the leading lights of the Black Crook ballet—a lively, dashy girl, full of animal spirits and overflowing with good-humor.

"I'm so glad," said Coralie, quickly; "I get very lonely sometimes."

"Why, don't your beau come to see you often?" cried Katie, in her impetuous way, and then suddenly stopped, in confusion.

Coralie blushed to her temples, and the soft eyes were cast upon the ground.

"Well, there, I didn't mean that. I'm real sorry. I'm always making such blunders," Katie said, in despair.

"Why, I'm sure you haven't said any thing wrong," Coralie replied, slowly.

"But, you colored up just as red as fire."

"Did I?" and the girl looked confused and helpless.

"Yes, but you're so different to me. Now I talk about my beaus with everybody."

"Have you more than one?" Coralie asked, in amazement.

"Why, bless your little heart, I've got a dozen!" replied Katie, triumphantly. "I might have double that number if I liked, but it's too much trouble to take care of them."

"And do you like them all, equally well?"

"Oh, no!" cried the dancing girl, quickly; "there isn't one of them that I like like Joe."

"Ah, Joe is the favored one, then?"

"He's such a good fellow—and he's so smart. Joe is a newspaper man. He writes puffs about me; he says that I am an angel, that my dancing is as light as a rose-leaf floating on a summer breeze, and a lot more just such pretty stuff. He's real sweet."

"His writings you mean?"

"Both!" Katie responded, emphatically, "but he don't always write pretty. He writes about murders and prize-fights, and elections, and all such things."

"What paper is he attached to?"

"All of 'em," replied Kate, briskly; "it don't matter to him which one, as long as he gets a good price; as he said, it's a most astonishing thing, the worse the newspaper, the higher the price. And he goes and interviews people, too, and gets kicked down-stairs—"

"Why, how dreadful that must be!" interrupted Coralie.

"Oh, he says that he don't mind it now if the stairs ain't too long; he's got used to it. In fact, he says that he is disappointed if he doesn't get kicked out, because it makes such a good finish to the article. But, what are you studying, dear?"

"Juliet."

"Oh, that dreadful, love-sick thing. Why, they're not going to play that, are they?"

"No; I am only studying it for my own amusement."

"Well, I thought so, for Joe says that it's no use playing Shakspeare nowadays—that he's too slow for the present age—that they want Black Crooks, clog dances and real fire; that the public understand that sort of shows."

"I suppose he knows; but the language is beautiful," Coralie said, enthusiasm lighting her pale face.

"Yes, but it's too slow. How much salary do you get a week?" Katie asked, suddenly.

"Thirty dollars."

"And I get a hundred," exclaimed the dancing girl, triumphantly. "You use your brains, and I use my toes, there's the difference. But, Coralie, don't you ever have any one come to see you—any young gentleman, I mean?" Katie asked, with a cunning glance at the crimsoning face of the young actress. "Come, puss, tell the truth."

"Yes—some one used to come to see me—but he doesn't come now," she added, quickly, her soft eyes bent on the ground.

"Why doesn't he come now?"

"I—I don't know," Coralie said, shyly.

"Didn't you like to have him come?"

"Yes—but—"

"But what?"

"I didn't love him."

"But you liked him a little?"

"Yes."

"Bet you a pair of gloves, you dear old sweetness, that I can tell who it was!" cried Katie, stealing her arm around the waist of her friend.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Coralie, in astonishment. "I know you can not."

"David Van Rensselaer!"

"Ah!"

The young girl started in astonishment, and her face grew white as a sheet.

"How did you guess that?" she asked, her lips trembling, and the tear-drops standing in her large eyes.

"Don't be worried, dear," said Kate, caressingly, kissing the smooth cheek of the other. "Joe told me that he was an admirer of yours; that's the way I knew."

"You know that, with the exception of Doctor Warne, I haven't a single friend. It was the doctor that introduced Mr. Van Rensselaer to me, and since his death he has seemed quite near to me."

"Are you sure that you don't love him, you dear old girl?" Kate asked, smoothing back the golden-brown hair from the forehead.

"Yes, I am sure."

"Well, if you don't love him, I wouldn't have him come to see you any more."

"Why not?"

"Because Joe says that he speaks about visiting you in

public, and he ought not to do that," answered the ballet girl.

"I did not believe that he would do such a thing," Coralie said, slowly.

"You know people *do* talk so dreadfully about us who are on the stage. Of course they don't dare to talk about me, because almost everybody knows that Joe and I are engaged.

"Why, Joe wouldn't get into a quarrel?"

"Oh, no, not into a regular fight, my dear; he knows better than that. When he gets into a quarrel, he always goes and hires the biggest man he can find to do his fighting for him. He says it's much more gentlemanly than to fight himself. But you're sure that you don't love Mr. Van Rensselaer?"

"Yes, I am sure, because—"

"Because— Oh! you've got a secret! Now, if you don't tell it to me instantly I'll bite your little finger off!"

"Because I love some one else," and Coralie hid her face on her friend's shoulder.

"How nice!" exclaimed Katie, sympathy in her voice; "and who is it, and where is he?"

"I don't know; I haven't seen him for three years."

"What a long time!"

"Yes; before I went on the stage, I used to sell oranges in the street; I was quite small then; I have grown much taller in the last three years."

"And he used to buy your oranges?"

"Yes, sometimes, not very often, for he was very poor and couldn't afford it. He was very dissipated too."

"And you loved him in spite of it?" asked Kate, in wonder.

"Yes; I couldn't help it. Oh, Katie, you don't know how fascinating he was! There was something about him that made me love him, in spite of myself. I used to live right opposite to him; and one night I went over to carry an orange to him, and we had a long talk together. He refused to accept my orange as a present, but offered to pay me with a kiss!"

"What a sensible fellow!"

"Yes, and in my lips he must have read my heart, for he led me on, little by little, until, at last, I told him how much I loved him."

"You told him?"

"Yes; I know it was very unmaidenly, but the truth would come in spite of everything. Then he told me how much he loved me, and that he would try to be steady for my sake; then he took me right to his heart, kissed me again and again, and then I ran away."

"I don't believe that I should have done that," Katie said, seriously.

"About an hour afterward I looked out of the window and saw his house all on fire. I ran across the street, unlocked the door of his room—it was locked on the outside—and found him lying senseless on the floor. I dragged him right through the flames into the street. I don't know what gave me the strength and courage, but I did it; then there was a crash, the wall fell; and when I recovered my senses, I was in the hospital."

"And the young man?"

"I don't know whether he is alive or dead," the girl replied, sadly.

"But you love his memory though?"

"Yes."

The door opened, and a servant announced:

"Mr. Van Rensselaer wishes to see you, Miss Coralie."

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARING FOR BATTLE.

A SLIGHT quiver agitated Van Rensselaer's handsome face as he listened to the threat of the Californian.

"You place the rope of the hangman around my throat?" he said.

"That's my little game, to use the slang term," replied the detective, coolly.

"You will find it to be a difficult matter."

"But I'll do it, you can bet all your rocks on that. You murdered O'Kale, and for that murder you must answer to the law."

"You in person will not call me to an account," Van Rensselaer said, a sneer upon his lips.

"It would be poor and paltry vengeance for me, if my hand alone were to strike you. Had I wished to constitute myself the minister of justice, I should not have taken the trouble to visit you and forewarn you of your danger. But I wish you to know that I am living—that I am on your trail, and that my purpose is to give you to a shameful death. You must know that the blow comes from me, or else my vengeance would lose half its sweetness."

"Your words sound like an old-time romance," Van Rensselaer said, flippantly. "You really take the trouble to warn me of the danger that I am in."

"Exactly; that you may be on your guard," replied the Californian, quietly. "It is to be a fair and open fight between us—no bushwhacking—and, as the old-time romance would say, may God defend the right."

Van Rensselaer's lip curled in disdain.

"Now for the programme," continued the white-hatted detective. "In the first place, I am going to strike at your reputation. You are part owner of a gambling-room on Twenty-third street. I propose to let the public at large know that fact. I intend to hold you up before all New York as a cheating rascal—a blackleg."

Van Rensselaer started, and cast a glance of fire at the Californian, but it did not trouble that cool and determined gentleman in the least.

"Then, that great and good work accomplished, I'm going to strike at your fortune," continued Bright. "Your half-sister, Alice—I intend to find her and give her the rights to which the law entitles her. After these two blows—the first at your reputation, the second at your fortune—I strike at your life; but the law will be the weapon that I shall use."

"And you intend to do all this?" Van Rensselaer questioned, in contempt.

"You've heard my programme."

"You have forgotten one very important fact."

"Indeed! and what is it?" asked the detective, not in the least disturbed.

"A certain paper, calling for a hundred dollars, purporting to be signed by me and bearing your indorsements," Van Rensselaer said, a cold look in his clear blue eyes, and a tone of triumph in his voice.

"Bless you! I remember all about that," Bright said, carelessly.

"That paper is still in existence, still in my possession, still a weapon against you. I can revive the old forgery charge and send you to Sing Sing, where you will have ample time to reflect upon the folly of contending with me!" Van Rensselaer exclaimed, in triumph.

"Easy as falling off a log, ain't it?" Bright asked, with a good-humored smile upon his bronzed features. "But, David, my boy, to use the old expression, that chicken won't fight. That bit of paper was indorsed by Royal Keene. Good; I won't dispute that fact; but now, just prove if you can that I am Royal Keene."

Van Rensselaer saw at a glance the strength of the other's position, and his face clouded over again.

"Three years have changed me greatly," continued the Californian. "James Bright, the Californian detective, doesn't look much like Royal Keene, the drunken Tombs lawyer. Any good legal gentleman will tell you that the identity question is a very difficult one to handle sometimes. Besides, three years have elapsed since the little bit of paper that we speak of saw the light; that complicates the case a little. In regard to the identity question, of course, between ourselves, now that no witnesses are by, except the four walls that surround us, I frankly confess that I am the man, but at the same time defy you to prove it."

"Time will show, sir, which of us holds the winning hand," returned Van Rensselaer, fiercely.

"Co-rect," said the Californian, in his off-hand, easy way.

"And now that I have delivered my cartel, that you are in possession of the fact that the war between us is to the death, I will take my departure. Be on your guard, for I shall commence operations at once. Adieu."

And with graceful, easy politeness, the cool, careless stranger bowed himself out of the apartment.

Van Rensselaer remained for a few moments silent in thought. He paced slowly up and down the room. The sudden and unexpected appearance of the man who he supposed had perished in the flames of the burning house three years before, was an event calculated to interfere materially with his plans. Then the thought of the old savant from India, who carried with him the missing will, came into Van Rensselaer's mind.

"If this fellow, by any strange accident, should learn of the will," he murmured, "then, indeed, he might be able to strike a blow at me which would require all my skill to parry. I must act promptly. No time is to be lost. I need an agent in this matter, for it will not do for me to appear at all in the affair."

Van Rensselaer caressed the ends of his silken mustache, reflectively. Suddenly his gloomy face lighted up.

"I have the very man!" he muttered. "Tom Bishop! He, evidently, lives by his wits; a cool, shrewd fellow I should judge from what I have seen of him; the very man for my purpose."

Van Rensselaer glanced at his watch.

"Twenty minutes past ten. Just about the time to catch him on Broadway. I have noticed him standing in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel at this hour a dozen times or so. I may as well hunt him up at once. And now, Mr. Royal Keene, we shall see who will win in the struggle that is fated to take place between us."

Van Rensselaer procured his hat and gloves, and left the house. He took his way down the avenue.

As he had anticipated, in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel he saw the man he was in search of.

Tom Bishop was a man of thirty, about the medium height, with jet-black hair, cut tight to his head, and a mustache, which in color and stiffness resembled the bristles of a blacking-brush. There was something of the air of the well-known class, generally termed "Bowery Boys," about Mr. Bishop; what a newsboy would term "gallus." The New York "slang" is very expressive sometimes.

Bishop was dressed in style, sported his yellow kids, and his dainty cane, yet, as Van Rensselaer had remarked, he evidently lived by his wits, as no one of his acquaintance had ever heard him speak of following any occupation.

Where he lived was also as great a mystery as how he lived. During the daytime, after ten A. M., he was generally to be found either in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel or lounging carelessly up and down Broadway. At night the theater lobbies and the various club-rooms—gambling-hells

—of Broadway and the up-town cross-streets were graced by his presence.

Then, every once in a while, for a week or a month at a time, Mr. Bishop would suddenly disappear, and then again as suddenly reappear.

Where he went to or what he did no one knew.

Mr. Bishop had quite an extensive list of acquaintances. He was a jolly, good-natured fellow, always flush with money, and not afraid to spend it; consequently his society was rather sought after by the young gentlemen desirous of seeing city life in all its various aspects.

Of course it was whispered that Mr. Bishop was a "sport," by which title the world knows the men who run gambling-houses, bet on horse-races and kindred affairs; but no one could say, of their own personal knowledge, that they knew of any thing discreditable to Mr. Bishop's character.

Such was the man whom Van Rensselaer was in search of, whom he desired to use as an instrument to further his own ends.

Van Rensselaer nodded to Bishop as he approached, and extended his hand in greeting, somewhat to that gentleman's astonishment.

CHAPTER V.

LAVING THE SNARE

"GOOD-MORNING," Van Rensselaer said, shaking the hand of the other cordially.

"Good-morning," replied Bishop, evidently amazed at the warm manner of the other.

"Didn't see you about last night."

"No; I had a little business to attend to."

"Ah, that reminds me, I've got a little bit of business that I want to talk to you about. If you have nothing better to do, join me in a stroll down Twenty-third street and I will explain matters."

"All right, I'm agreeable," Bishop replied, tersely, and the two left the front of the hotel and turned down Twenty-third street.

"Now, we will begin right at the beginning," Van Rensselaer said, commencing the conversation; "there is nothing like speaking plainly. Is a hundred dollars of any service to you?"

"Not to be sneezed at," replied Bishop, who perceived the drift of the question on the instant.

"Good; now I'll come to the point at once. There is a certain matter which concerns me greatly and which I can not attend to in person. I want some one to look after my interests, and I thought, possibly, I might be able to come to some arrangement with you in regard to the matter. Of course I suppose that it is hardly necessary for me to say that the affair is a very delicate one and must be handled carefully!"

Bishop nodded intelligently.

"I don't think that my lawyer could attend to it, nor my doctor. It requires a cool, experienced man of the world."

"Yes, I think that I understand; when you say, 'man of the world,' you mean a fellow up to all sorts of rascality?"

"Exactly."

"I think you've come to the right shop, then," the New Yorker said, complacently; "there isn't much going on in this little town that I ain't up to."

"That is what I thought. Of course this thing must be kept secret."

"Oh, of course; never do to tell tales out of school, you know."

"I will explain all the particulars. A certain party is coming to New York. When that party arrives in New York, I want him induced to go some place where he can

drink something that will put him to sleep for ten or fifteen minutes; nothing to endanger his life of course."

"I understand," Bishop said, winking knowingly.

"Do you know of any place where he can be taken, and will you take him there? There's the whole affair in a nutshell."

"Well," Bishop said, reflectively, "this requires a little consideration. What sort of a man is he? young?"

"No, old," Van Rensselaer said; "a man who has spent the best part of his life in India."

"Do you think that he would be apt to be up to our city tricks?"

"Hardly."

"When will he arrive?"

"Wednesday afternoon."

"Wednesday afternoon," repeated Bishop, thoughtfully; "let me see, says the blind man. Wednesday night there's a grand masquerade ball at the Academy of Music. Now, if I could induce him to go there and then get some pretty woman to fascinate him and fool him into going with her, I know a place where we could fix him without any trouble."

"But the woman?" Van Rensselaer said, slowly. "It is not wise to trust a secret like this to the keeping of such as we shall have to employ."

"There's just where the shoe pinches!" Bishop exclaimed.

A sudden thought occurred to Van Rensselaer.

"Where is the place to which you thought of taking the party?"

"John Allen's dance-house, in Water street. We can have a hack all ready. The old fellow will never know where he is going, nor the woman either for that matter."

"She need not know," Van Rensselaer repeated, thoughtfully; "that is true. I know a woman whom I can trust to serve as a decoy duck. I shall not let her know any of the details of the plan, nor in fact any thing of it. I have thought of an idea that will blind her eyes as to our purpose. Now then, you must meet the old man at the depot, as if you came from me. I have his picture, so that you will be able to pick him out of the crowd. I'll think of some excuse for my absence."

Slowly the two walked onward, arranging the details of their plan.

Van Rensselaer's face was bright and his eyes glistened as he plotted the destruction of the precious paper that the old savant from India was bringing. The wily David would not have felt so secure of triumph had he known that, when he accosted Bishop in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel, from one of the windows of the reading-room the Californian detective beheld the meeting.

Leaving the two plotters to pursue their way down Twenty-third street, we will return to Broadway, the great artery of New York.

We will follow the great life-stream down the famous street of the New World.

Past Union Square, down the crowded thoroughfare till we pause in front of the new City Court House, that famous pile which has been slowly rising upward since the memory of the modern New Yorker runneth backward and which is not yet completed.

Just in front of the square two men had halted and had clasped hands.

Two men, strong contrast each to the other.

One, a German Jew by birth, a short, thick-set, portly man of fifty, with little keen black eyes, a hooked nose and a bearded chin, clad in a suit of black broadcloth. A beautiful solitaire diamond glistened on his immaculate shirt-bosom, and a heavy cluster diamond ring adorned his little finger. A jolly, contented-looking gentleman was he; one evidently

used to good living, and at peace with himself and all the world.

The other was a tall, thin person, with a thin face, shrewd gray eyes and sandy-colored hair, dressed carelessly in a dark-gray suit, and wearing a little soft felt hat, pulled down over his forehead.

The first of the two was the well-known Broadway diamond broker, Isaac Abrams; the second, the equally well known light of the Bohemian world, Joe Oward, the writer—a gentleman who delighted in describing life in glowing colors, and whose ready pen was never restrained by the prosaic hand of truth.

"Ah, my tear, how you was all the time, eh?" exclaimed the broker, in his jolly, cordial way.

"Lively; how do you flourish?" the reporter said.

"I ish putty well. Ah, mine goot friend, I hafe got one leetle question to put to you. You know Mademoiselle Heloise, the danseuse?"

"Of course; I'm a particular friend of hers."

"So s'help me Isaac! you newspaper fellows knows everybody!" the German cried, with uplifted hands. "I say, I wants an introduction to the lady."

"Certainly; are you infatuated with the divine Heloise?" and the reporter poked the broker playfully in the ribs.

"She pretty girl. I go to the theater every night; I like fun," Abrams replied. "Now I tells you what I do; you introduce me, and I gifes you nice diamond ring; sparkles so that it puts your eye out."

"It's a bargain; shake," said Oward, laconically.

"Dat ish goot. Oh!" exclaimed Abrams, suddenly, "I hafe von little crow to pick with you. The next time you write what you call a sensation article about the diamond brokers on Broadway, you leaves me out, eh? So s'help me Isaac! all my friends come to me and say, 'You see the Police Gazette? it has a full description of you and of your place, and how you do business.' Dat is not right," and the worthy broker looked grieved, and shook his head sorrowfully.

"But I didn't mention any names; no one could guess who I meant," Oward replied, laughing.

"Yes, but you gifes a full description of me; you speaks of mine beard; you say I go to the theater every night; den you speaks of mine nose. So s'help me Isaac, you put my picture in next!"

"Oh, I sha'n't go as far as to do that."

"It ish no joke. I always treats you well."

"Yes, but I did you justice. I said that you were an honest man, and one of the most liberal brokers on Broadway."

"Dat ish truth!" exclaimed the German, proudly. "I always gife half as much as a thing is worth, and never charge more as five hundred per shent interest. You don't put me in the paper no more, eh?"

"No, that's honest," Oward replied; "but I say, Abrams, if you want an introduction to Mademoiselle Heloise, come to the masquerade ball at the Academy of Music, Wednesday evening. She will be there, and you shal' have your introduction."

"Dat ish all right; you ish a putty goot fellow, but you don't put me in de newspaper no more; good-morning," and the broker waddled onward, while the newspaper man continued his walk up-town.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OFFER.

KATIE sprung to her feet the moment the door closed behind the servant.

"I had better go, dear," she said; "remember my warn-

ing about Mr. Van Rensselaer. You're a dear, good little woman yourself, but you mustn't imagine that everybody else is like you."

"I shall not forget, and I shall speak to Mr. Van Rensselaer very plainly," the actress replied, in her quiet way.

"That's right!" cried Katie, impulsively; "I confess I don't like him a bit. He's one of these proud fellows who seems to imagine that, because he's got a little money, he's a great deal better than any one else. Well, I'll run away, so that you can see your visitor. By-bye!" and the light-hearted little girl hastened away.

Coralie remained for a few moments silent in thought; then she rose and descended to the little parlor of the boarding-house, where she found David Van Rensselaer awaiting her.

He rose at her approach, and bowed in his usually courtly way.

"Mr. Van Rensselaer," the girl said, and in the three words she contrived to throw such an expression of scornful wonder that it cut the cool and impassive gentleman to the quick. A hot flush came over his face, and his lips quivered as he spoke.

"You are doubtless astonished at my visit; permit me to explain," he said, quite humbly.

"You have deeply wronged me, sir, and I do not think that you will be able to explain that," Coralie replied, in cold contempt.

"I wrong you!" Van Rensselaer said, in confusion.

"Yes."

"How?"

"You have boasted among your friends of your intimacy with the actress. Like a coward, you spoke falsely. I have no father, no brother to defend me, and you have tarnished the good name which, actress as I am, I prize dearer than life."

The pale cheeks of the girl flushed crimson with hot blood as she spoke.

Van Rensselaer bit his lip; his eyes were cast upon the ground, and his face was pale. Seldom in his life had he heard such bitter, cutting words.

"Coralie," he said, gently, and after quite a long pause, "I fear that some one has defamed me. True, I have spoken of you; mentioned, with some little pride, I confess, that I was honored with your friendship, but I have never boasted of that friendship. I value it too highly to do that. To prove to you how sincere I am in what I say, I now offer you my hand and heart. I shall be only too proud to make you my wife."

The girl looked at her suitor for a moment in wonder. She was not prepared for such an offer.

"You make me your wife?" she said, slowly. "You forget how different are our stations in life. Your wealthy friends would laugh at you for marrying the actress, the woman who works for her bread with both hands and brain."

"Coralie, I care very little for the world's opinion regarding my acts," Van Rensselaer replied. "Besides, the opinion of the world regarding those who follow the stage for a living has changed greatly within the last few years. There is no disgrace in honest labor. Think what a position my love can give you. I come of one of the old New York families, of as good blood as can be found in America. Wealth, social station, all shall be yours. No longer will it be a struggle for you against the world, but ease, rest, affluence. Perhaps you may answer that you do not love me; but I am sure that you like me, and in time the love may come."

"Do you know the story of my life?" the girl asked.

"No."

"Listen to it; then you will be able to decide whether I can accept your love or not."

"Sit down, and I will listen."

Van Rensselaer placed a chair by the window for the girl, then brought another for himself, and sat down by her side.

"Go on," he said.

"Three years ago a poor girl made a living selling fruit in the streets of the city. She was exposed to both insult and temptation. She was friendless, alone. One day, in front of the Tombs, in Center street, a man dared to insult her. A stranger standing by interfered, and with a single blow rescued her. From that time, that stranger, who was only a poor wretched outcast like herself, befriended her. She learned to love him, for she saw that, despite his vices, he had a noble heart. One night the two, both alone in the world, both friendless, came to an understanding. Two hours afterward, standing together, watching a rude house blazing in flames, the girl was struck by a falling brick and hurled senseless to the earth. When she recovered, she found herself in the hospital. There Heaven took pity on the orphan, and sent a friend to aid her. One of the doctors, an old, gray-haired man, all alone in the world, felt compassion for the friendless girl. She told him her simple story, and, at the end of the three months, when she left the hospital, he offered to provide for her until she could choose a path in life, and by her own exertions gain her bread. A happy thought induced the girl to try the stage. Her second father had influence with one of the leading managers, and so secured her a chance to try whether she had talent for acting or not. The attempt was made, and she succeeded. Her after-career you know."

"And the man whom she once loved?"

The girl shook her head.

"You do not know whether he is alive or dead?"

"No."

"The chances then are ten to one that he is dead, or he would long since have come forward to claim you."

"But I have changed my name; Doctor Warne did not think that my own was a suitable one for the new life that I chose, and so he re-baptized me as Coralie York."

"And your true name?"

"Susan Wilson."

"Not quite as pretty a one as the other," Van Rensselaer said, smiling. "Well, I have heard your story, and now I wait my answer."

"But I do not love you, although I will freely confess that I like you. There is something which bids me like you, despite myself. I can not tell what it is; I only know that the feeling exists."

"And in time that may grow into love."

"Perhaps so," the girl said, doubtfully.

"I am willing to risk it if you are."

"Give me three days to decide," the girl said, slowly.

"That is a bargain!" he cried, quickly; "and now, Coralie, that I stand almost in the light of an accepted lover, I have a favor to ask of you."

"A favor? What is it?"

"You know that there is going to be a grand masquerade ball at the Academy of Music, next Wednesday evening?"

"Yes."

"Are you going?"

"I think not—I have not really decided yet."

"I wish you would go and allow me to act as your escort. I have a little scheme to put into execution wherein I need your aid. That is the favor I would ask."

"Why, what do you wish me to do?"

"There is an old friend of my father coming to town; he is to visit the masquerade, and I have laid a wager with a friend of mine that, at the ball, I will induce him to leave it and go to this friend's house. The gentleman is a queer fellow, full of odd whims and totally unused to society, having spent the better part of his life in the jungles of India. You

can use any device you please. It is only a simple masquera-
ding joke. I will be by your side throughout the whole
affair."

"Well, I will go, but I won't promise to aid you in this
jest until I see the gentleman," the girl said, slowly.

"There's no harm in it, I assure you!" Van Rensselaer ex-
claimed, earnestly; "but you shall see for yourself. I will
come for you in a carriage about nine. What disguise will
you wear?"

"Nothing but my black water-proof cloak, that covers me
completely."

"Excellent; and now, Coralie, I will bid you good-by.
Remember, I leave my fate in your hands." Van Rensselaer
rose to go.

"You do not fear, then, the other love which I have con-
fessed is in my heart?"

"Not a whit," he replied, gravely; "what have I to do
with the dead past? It is with the living future that we
must deal. Adieu."

Coralie accompanied him to the door, and Van Rensselaer
descended the steps with a light heart.

A smile of triumph was on his handsome face as he walked
up the street.

"She will snap up the bait, like a hungry trout the un-
wary fly that hovers too near the surface of the stream.
Make her my wife?" and his lips curled in scorn. "Oh, no!
I have other views than that, my ambitious little woman.
'Twas necessary to use some device to entrap her into serv-
ing my purpose at this masquerade, and that is as good as
any. Now, if I can wrest the will from the hands of the
old savant, I can laugh at this fellow, Keene, and his threats.
Find the heir! there, too, I defy him!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

At the Hudson River Railway Depot the cars of the S.P.M. Pacific express were in waiting.

By the gate leading to the train stood a brown-bearded
gentleman, plainly dressed, apparently waiting for some one,
for he cast anxious glances around, and every now and then
consulted his watch.

"Why the deuce don't he come?" he queried, probably for
the twentieth time, as he again consulted his time-piece.
"Only ten minutes more. I can't go without instructions;
that is very plain."

The brown-bearded gentleman peered earnestly into the
faces of the crowd who were passing by him to take seats in
the train, but his inspection was evidently without results.

As the impatient watcher tapped nervously with his foot,
and fumbled with his watch-chain, another gentleman, who
had just entered the depot, sauntered carelessly to his side,
and stood there, apparently without any particular object.

A single, piercing glance the brown-bearded man gave at
the new-comer, and then again resumed his watch upon the
little throng pouring forward into the cars.

The second man was about the medium height, dark hair,
cut short, and dark eyes; his face cleanly shaven. He was
dressed very plain, almost poorly, in dark clothes, and wore
a dark cap, pulled over his forehead.

"Why don't he come?" again muttered the watcher, with
another look at his time-piece. "Only five minutes more
I shall miss this train, sure!"

"Getting tired of waiting?" said the poorly-dressed man
at his side, calmly.

The watcher turned and looked at the questioner in utter
surprise; but, as he surveyed him from head to foot, the look
upon his face changed from one of wonder to one of recogni-
tion.

"Well, you can take me into camp for all I'm worth!" he
cried, in amazement. "Blessed if I knew you!"

"Is my get-up as complete as all that?" said the other,
laughing.

"That's so; I took a good look at you when you came up,
too," the brown-bearded man answered.

"I thought I would try it on you; if I succeeded in de-
ceiving the eyes of the sharpest detective in New York, I can
hardly fail with anybody else."

"No humbug, you know," the other said, but still with a
smile on his face at the compliment.

"Oh, honest Injun! fame speaks in spite of your mod-
esty."

"But, what is the reason of this get-up?"

"The man that I'm after is a cool, desperate hand if he
wants to be. When he finds out that I have struck his trail
in earnest, he may think that the easiest way to baffle me
will be to get some rough to lay me out. In the game I'm
playing I don't intend to lose a single trick if I can help it;
so, for the present, James Bright, the California detective,
will mysteriously disappear."

The new-comer, who had, by such simple means as cutting
off his hair, changing his clothes, and giving himself a clean
shave, so altered his outward appearance, was, indeed, the
man who had sworn such bitter vengeance on David Van
Rensselaer.

His companion, the quick-eyed gentleman with the flow-
ing brown beard, was Richard Cranshaw, by common report
reputed to be one of the cutest detectives in the country.

"You're wise," Cranshaw said; "nothing like being pre-
pared. But, what instructions? About time for the train
to move off, you know."

Bright took a letter from his pocket and put it into the
hands of the detective.

"You will find all instructions written in this," he said, as
he handed the detective the letter. "I partially followed the
trail up myself three years ago. I have noted down all the
points I gained. All I discovered, though, were the facts
about the birth and parentage of the child. I didn't hunt
up the girl herself. But now the case has altered. We
must have the girl; work to find her; that is our strong
point. Once the girl is in my hands the game is won."

"I'll do my best; you have written out the instructions in
full?"

"Yes, you change cars at Rome. Sandy Creek is only a
little bit of a place," Bright said. "Of course be careful not
to let any one guess what you're after, if you can help it.
My bird may possibly be in communication with some one
up there, although I hardly think it possible. But, if he
should happen to be, a hint of your search would put him on
his guard."

"I'll be careful."

Then the bell rung; the detective jumped on board the
train, and, as it moved off, Bright sauntered slowly out of
the depot.

"So much of the train laid," he muttered; "it won't be
very long before the explosion comes. Let me find the heir,
and then, Mr. David Van Rensselaer, look out for me."

Bright crossed over to Broadway and walked down that
broad thoroughfare.

Slowly he walked onward, busy in meditation.

Just as he crossed Twenty-fourth street, he came face to
face with a lady walking in the opposite direction.

A single glance the keen-eyed detective gave at the face of
the lady, and he stood still in speechless astonishment.

The lady, who was both young and pretty, never noticed
the stare, but passed on up the street.

Bright turned and looked after her.

"Now, then, you young feller, will you get out of the way, or do you want a first-class funeral?"

The above speech, hurled indignantly at Bright by a coachman, who had been compelled to rein up his horses suddenly to keep from running over the astonished man, recalled the detective to himself.

"All right, Johnny; go ahead with your mule team," the detective said, returning to the curbstone, and following in the footsteps of the woman who had so strangely attracted his attention.

"It's either her or her ghost!" Bright muttered, as he walked onward. "She's changed a great deal, but it's her face. I'd bet all my Young America No. 2 stock on it. Judging from her dress, the world has gone well with her. She looks gay as a pink, and ain't she pretty?"

The cool detective smiled as he put the question to himself.

The lady walked briskly onward, little thinking that her footsteps were so closely followed.

"It would be funny if I should stumble on her just in this accidental way," Bright muttered, communing with himself as he followed up the chase. "Sleeping or waking, for three years that face has been constantly in my mind. In the diggings, every time I've seen the gold panning out from the cradle, I've also seen her face smiling at me from the muddy water. Well, now, to drop on her in this unexpected way is really what I call luck, and no mistake."

On went the lady; close behind followed the detective, until at last she entered a store. After a few minutes she came out, with a little parcel in her hand, and proceeded to retrace her steps, going down Broadway. Still the detective followed.

She turned into Twenty-third street, went down the street quite a little distance, and tripped up the steps of a modest little brick house.

"Run to earth, by jingo!" cried Bright, in glee. He had followed cautiously; dropping a little in the rear, so as to not excite the suspicion of the girl that she was watched.

The door closed behind the lady, and the detective stood outside in the gloom, gazing up at the house.

"Now, how the deuce am I going to find out what she is or who she is—whether she lives here or is only making a visit?" he queried, as he looked up at the house. "Well impudence must carry me through here."

He ascended the steps and rung the bell.

After a few moments the door opened, and a woman, evidently the servant of the house, appeared.

"Miss Jones," said the detective, blandly.

The servant girl stared at the questioner; the confident tone in which he spoke puzzled her.

"An' is it Miss Jones?" she asked, doubtfully.

"Yes, Miss Jones," the detective repeated.

"An' does she live here?" asked the girl, her voice betraying strong proof of south-of-Ireland birth.

"That is what I want to find out."

"Oh, I thought from the way ye axed, ye knew she lived here, an' it was bothered I was, for no one of that name lives here at all," the girl said, her mind evidently relieved.

"But the young lady that went in just now, dressed in black, with a red sash—"

"Shure, her name isn't Jones!"

"No?" cried the detective, in apparent astonishment.

"That's Miss York, the stage actress—Miss Coralie York."

"And does she live here?"

"Av coorse she does!" the girl replied.

The detective had discovered what he wished to learn.

"Well, now! I really thought it was Miss Jones, a very intimate friend of mine. I made a mistake. I'm very sorry to trouble you," and the detective took his departure.

"Shure, he's a rael gentleman," the girl said, as she closed the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MASQUERADE.

Just about an hour after the interview at the depot between the two detectives, the Western express rolled into the building.

From one of the cars came a tall, stately old gentleman, with long iron-gray hair and a flowing beard of the same color. His face was bronzed almost to the color of an Indian. In his hand he carried a small carpet-bag.

As he stepped upon the platform, he looked inquiringly around him as if he expected to meet some one.

Hardly had the old gentleman paused upon the platform, when from the little knot of people gathered at the nearest door, Van Rensselaer's ally, Mr. Bishop, advanced.

He came forward directly to the old man.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Hartright?" he asked, of the old gentleman.

"That is my name, sir," the stranger replied.

"Allow me to introduce myself; my name is Bishop; Mr. Van Rensselaer deputed me to meet you at the train."

"Mr. Van Rensselaer is not here, then?"

"No, sir; he has been called out of town on important business," Bishop answered. "He desired me to tell you that he was very much disappointed at not being able to meet you, but the business was urgent and required his personal attention; in the mean time, until his return, he requested me to fill his place and see that you were comfortably bestowed. Mr. Van Rensselaer also wished me to say that he deeply regretted he was unable to entertain you at his mansion, but hoped that you would accept his hospitality at any hotel which might seem fit to you."

"I am such a stranger in New York that really I do not know where I had better go," the old gentleman said.

"If you will permit me to arrange the matter—that is, if you have no particular preference—"

"None at all."

"I would suggest the St. Nicholas."

"That will do."

"Have you any baggage?"

"Nothing but this," the old man replied. "I am a true traveler, and do not believe in much luggage, although my traveling has been mostly done in the jungles of India."

"I'll call a coach."

Bishop did so, and the two were driven at once to the hotel.

The New Yorker attended to seeing the old gentleman bestowed in a comfortable room, and then the two had supper.

The repast over, the two adjourned to the reading-room, and drawing their chairs to the window, gazed out on brilliant, flashing Broadway.

"Half-past eight," said Bishop, consulting his watch. "I suppose that you feel fatigued by your journey and will retire early?"

"Oh, no," the old gentleman replied; "I am so used to travel and hardships that the trip from Buffalo has not tired me in the least."

"I was just going to suggest that, if you were not too much fatigued, we might visit the Academy of Music. There is a grand masquerade ball given there to-night; I was presented with a couple of tickets this afternoon. It would serve to pass the evening away."

"That's an excellent idea," responded Hartright. "I think I should enjoy that. I haven't been to a masquerade for years."

"This is to be a magnificent affair, I believe. We can get there by half-past nine or ten easily enough."

"But will we not require some disguises?" the old gentleman asked.

"We can stop at a costumer's and get some dominoes and masks on our way up; we pass right by one," Bishop answered. "I suppose we might as well set out at once."

"Certainly."

The two left the hotel, summoned a carriage, and drove toward the Academy of Music.

On their way thither, they stopped at a costumer's, and procured two black dominoes and masks.

When the two, after donning their disguises, made their entry into the Academy, they found that the floor was already well filled with groups of gayly-dressed maskers.

"A brilliant scene, isn't it?" Bishop remarked, taking the mask from his face, as if to gaze with more freedom upon the ever-changing throng.

"Yes, quite dazzling," the old man replied, and as he gazed upon the merry groups, his attention was attracted by a couple passing near him, a man and woman, both in black, and on the back of the man's sable domino was a large red heart.

The two were chatting gayly together; a few words spoken by the woman's lips reached the ears of the old man.

With a quick, nervous motion, Hartright laid his hand upon the arm of Bishop.

"Come, let us walk onward," he said, a strange nervousness visible in his manner.

"Certainly," Bishop replied, wondering at the tone of the old man.

Htright followed directly in the wake of the couple in black. Bishop noticed the red heart on the back of the man's domino, and a half-smile came upon his face. A few minutes' walk convinced him that his companion was following the two.

The two in black did not go far, but turned and retraced their steps, coming almost face to face with the old savant and Bishop.

The man in black shot a quick glance at Bishop as he passed him—a glance seemingly of recognition. The savant did not notice the look; he had eyes only for the woman.

Three times up and down the hall, the old man and Bishop followed in the footsteps of the two in black.

The old gentleman seemed to be getting more and more nervous. Bishop determined to hazard a question.

"You seem to have taken an interest in that couple in black; do you know them?" he asked.

"I don't know—I can't tell," the old man answered, nervously; "it seems impossible, and yet—"

Again he fixed his eyes on the woman, and sighed deeply.

"I don't understand how you could recognize either of them," Bishop said, puzzled at the strange behavior of the old man. "The masks conceal their faces and black gowns their figures."

"As the girl passed me, I heard her speak," the old man replied. "It is hardly twenty years since I have heard that voice, yet I recognized the tones in an instant."

Bishop was thunderstruck.

"What the deuce does it all mean?" he muttered between his teeth. "How can he know the woman?"

"I would give a great deal to be able to speak with her, and satisfy the suspicion that has arisen in my breast. Do you think I shall be able to speak with her? Do you know of any means by which I can gain five minutes' conversation with her? I would willingly pay a drop of my blood for each word, old as I am."

A strange excitement had seized the old man, which completely puzzled Bishop; yet that astute gentleman rather prided himself on his skill in guessing motives.

"Oh, I don't think there will be much difficulty about that," the New Yorker replied. "There is a certain license allowable in a masquerade."

"For Heaven's sake get me a chance to speak with her if it be possible!" cried the old man, hastily.

"Well, I'll try," Bishop said, more and more amazed. "And now I look at the gentleman I have an idea that I know him. Just wait; when they turn I'll go forward and speak to him. Then, when I draw him aside, you can improve the chance to speak to the lady."

"That will do," the old man said, hurriedly.

When the two turned in their promenade and came face to face with Bishop and the old man, the New Yorker barred the way of the gentleman so completely wrapped in the black domino.

"Can I have a word with you, sir?" he asked.

The man in black bowed, whispered a few words in the ear of the lady, then stepped a little apart with Bishop, while Hartright, improving the advantage, slowly approached the masked woman.

"Old Nick himself is playing your game to-night," Bishop said, in the ear of the other, as they drew apart from the rest.

"What do you mean?" asked the disguised man, and the voice betrayed David Van Rensselaer.

"Why, he's got an idea into his head that he knows that young female that's with you."

"Knows her?" asked Van Rensselaer, in astonishment.

"Yes; he wants to speak with her; she's your decoy, I suppose?"

"I hope so; but she has not yet consented. Of course she knows nothing of my scheme, and thinks it is only a joke."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Bishop; "see! the two are in conversation."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE SNARE.

THE lady, Van Rensselaer's companion, who was no other than Coralie York, had remained motionless, gazing with listless eyes upon the motley throng which surrounded her, when she suddenly became conscious that a tall stranger, clad in a black domino, had approached her as if with the wish to speak.

She raised her eyes in astonishment and made a slight movement as if she would retreat from his advances.

"Do not fear, lady," the stranger said, removing his mask from his face and revealing the gray beard and bronzed features of the savant. "I wished to speak with you very much. I trust you will pardon the liberty that I, an entire stranger, have taken in addressing you. A moment since when you passed me, busy in conversation, the tones of your voice fell upon my ears; those tones brought back to me the memories of days long since buried in the grave of time. The thought came instantly into my mind that I knew you—not as you now are, a woman—but as a child."

Coralie listened in astonishment. Her first thought on the approach of the stranger had been to avoid him, but when she listened to his words and beheld his calm and noble face, she saw at once that she had nothing to fear.

"You think that you have known me?" she asked.

"Yes; but far away from this great city, many years ago."

"And you recognized me by my voice?"

"Yes."

"But are you sure that I am the person you take me for?"

"No, not sure, but let me see your face and then I am

certain that I can tell whether you are the person or not," the old savant said.

"You really wish to see my face?" Coralie asked, slowly.

"Yes, for in your face I shall be sure to trace the resemblance of the child I once loved as if she were my own daughter, if you are indeed the same, and something within whispers me that you are."

Coralie hesitated for a moment; she did not know how to act. Van Rensselaer had pointed the tall stranger out to her as the old friend of his father—the subject of the wager which he wished her help to win. If she yielded to Van Rensselaer's request, she would be able to discover whether she was the child spoken of by the stranger or not.

"If I am the child, grown to womanhood, what would be my age now?" Coralie asked, breaking the silence.

The old man thought for a moment, calculated the time that had elapsed, then spoke:

"Twenty-five," he answered.

Coralie started in amazement. The old man had named her very age. Hartright noticed the movement.

"Is that your age?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And you are an orphan?"

"Yes."

"And have been so since your childhood?"

"Yes."

"Father and mother you have never known?"

"Never," the girl replied, sadly.

"I am sure that you are the one I seek!" the old man said, in a tone of firm conviction.

"Perhaps so; and yet it hardly seems possible that fate could have thus strangely brought us together after so many years of separation," Coralie said, doubtfully.

"Fortune is strangely capricious sometimes," he answered. "But I pray you yield to my request. You are the child I seek, I am sure. Every word you speak strengthens me in my conviction."

"Let me speak a moment to the gentleman who is with me, and then I will decide," the girl said, suddenly, after a long pause.

"I shall wait your decision with great impatience," the old man said, earnestly.

"In a few minutes you shall have my answer."

Coralie advanced toward Van Rensselaer; he, perceiving her movement, left Bishop and came to her.

"I see that you have commenced operations," he said, laughing; "have you decided then to act as my ally in this jest?"

"Not yet decided," she said, doubtfully. "I am not sure that I fully understand the part which you wish me to play."

"Why, it is simple enough. The wager is to induce the old gentleman to leave this ball-room and go to the house of a friend of mine, there to drink a glass of wine. That wins the wager. If you only think of some jesting device to induce him to go with you, I will be in the carriage of course, so that there will be no impropriety."

"The device is already at hand," the girl said, slowly.

"Indeed!" Van Rensselaer was astonished.

"The old gentleman overheard me speaking to you as we passed him sometime ago in the ball-room; he fancied from the tones of my voice that in former days he knew me, and he wishes to see my face, so as to satisfy himself whether his guess is true or false."

"Excellent!" Van Rensselaer exclaimed; "fortune aids us; no need to puzzle our wits here. Tell the old gentleman that you will remove your mask and let him see your face if he will leave the ball-room and come with us. Explain that it is only to the house of a friend of mine."

"I do not know whether to consent or not," the girl said, doubtfully.

"Why, Coralie, haven't you any womanly curiosity?" asked Van Rensselaer, in astonishment. "Haven't you really a desire to know whether this old gentleman is right or wrong in his surmise?"

"Yes, the temptation is a very great one," Coralie said, slowly.

"Yield to it then; who knows but what he may be able to reveal to you something of great importance?" Van Rensselaer said, persuasively.

"I will go," the girl said, decidedly.

"Good; our coach is all ready."

"I will tell the old gentleman."

Coralie returned to the old savant

"Let me venture to hope that you have decided to grant my request?" Hartright said, earnestly.

"Yes, but on one condition."

"I accept, no matter what the condition is," the savant exclaimed, hastily.

"Oh, it is a very simple one; only to leave this room and come with me—or with us, I should have said, for the gentleman yonder, my escort, will go with us."

"I accept the condition, and the sooner we depart the better. I feel certain that you are the one whom I seek."

"You shall soon know the truth."

Coralie beckoned, and Van Rensselaer approached. Disguised as he was, he had little fear of being recognized by the old man; so that in the future, when they should meet, his part in the present transaction would be unknown.

"We are ready," Coralie said.

Van Rensselaer did not speak, only bowed and led the way to the door. Coralie and Hartright followed, while Bishop brought up the rear.

"I suppose that there will be no objections to my friend accompanying us?" the old gentleman said, referring to Bishop.

"None in the least," the girl answered.

In a few words the savant explained to Bishop whether he was going, and his object, and requested his company, to which Bishop of course assented.

The four left the ball-room and passed into the entry.

Hardly had they passed through the door, when two men, without disguises of any kind, but in plain, dark clothes, only wearing black masks over their faces, detached themselves from the crowd and followed the little party of four.

Down through the passage-way into the street they followed, removing the masks from their faces as they emerged into the open air.

The four were just getting into a carriage. The two men paused on the steps, until the carriage drove off.

"What's our game now?" asked the taller of the two, who, as the light from the gaslights falls upon his face, we recognize as Joe Oward.

"Trump their trick," replied the other, laconically. It was the California detective, Bright, who spoke.

"You mean, follow 'em?"

"No; I mean to get ahead of them."

Then the detective drew a little whistle and blew a shrill note upon it.

In a second or so a covered buggy, which had been standing on the other side of the street, drew up in front of the Academy.

A bright-looking negro drove the buggy.

"Now, jump in, Joe!" cried Bright, springing into the carriage, and taking the reins from the driver's hands.

Oward got in at once.

"Wait at the stable, Ned," the detective said to the boy.

"You know where to go?" Oward asked, in astonishment.

"Yes, to the worst hole in all big New York, John Allen's dance-house in Water street. Get up!"

And away they went.

CHAPTER X

BACK FROM THE ISLAND.

WATER street by night. Not a very inviting locality, nor a very safe one for an unprotected stranger.

From the windows of a low, two-story brick house, painted a dingy green, the lights were shining brightly. The lower part of the house was fitted up as a saloon. It was a corner house, and on the side street all was dark. The front of the house alone was illuminated.

On the glass windows of the door "The Sailor's Rest" was inscribed in flaming red letters.

The saloon was not illy named, for, if report spoke truth, many a poor Jack Tar had gone to his last home—to Davy's locker—under the dingy roof.

The police kept a wary eye upon the saloon and its inmates; and among the force the Sailor's Rest was reputed to be the worst house in the precinct. It was a harbor for thieves and bad characters of all descriptions.

When one of the Water-street gang was "wanted," to use the detective term, the Sailor's Rest was the first place visited.

The saloon was in full blast; the sound of the music came through the doors and windows, accompanied by the shuffle of heavy feet and the boisterous laughter of coarse voices.

The jolly Jack Tars and the woolen-shirted longshoremen, together with the nimble-fingered, shoulder-hitting roughs, and the faded sirens of the dance-house, were indulging in the delights of a jig or a sailor's hornpipe. Double-shuffles and pigeon-wings were in order, followed by frequent visits to the bar for liquid refreshments.

As we enter the dance-house and gaze upon the scene, the "fun" is at its height.

The saloon was well filled by a motley crew. Ten o'clock had just struck. A dance had just ended, and the couples were crowding around the bar, where a tall, sallow-faced man, with short black hair and thin side-whiskers, in his shirt-sleeves, was dealing out the fiery fluids which the thirsty dancers poured down their throats like so much water.

Just at the end of the bar, side by side with a burly sailor, whose face and build betrayed the Englishman, stood a slender, fragile girl, hardly more than a child in years. She was the best looking of all the girls in the room, but her thin face, the dark circles under her eyes, and the hectic flush which tinged her hollow cheek, told plainly that the dark angel, Death, had marked her for his own.

As the girl stood by the counter, a boy entered the saloon—a little fellow, dressed in ragged clothes, and with that peculiar expression of cunning upon his thin, sharp features which a life in the street so soon gives to the poor little souls to whom fate has denied a home, and who gain their sustenance, like the outcast dogs and cats, out of the gutter.

The boy looked around for a moment with his sharp little eyes, then perceived the girl standing at the end of the bar.

Quietly he sidled up to her and pulled her by the skirt of the dress to attract her attention.

"What is it, Billy?" asked the girl, in a voice which had once been soft and musical, but was now harsh and thin.

The boy winked at her mysteriously.

She understood that he had something to say which he did not wish the sailor standing by her side to hear, so she bent down her head that he might whisper in her ear. The sailor, busy lighting a cigar, did not notice her movement.

"He's outside," whispered the boy.

"Who?" asked the girl, although she guessed full well who it was.

"Denny."

"Why don't he come in?"

"He's afeard of the perlice; his time ain't up on the Island yet," the boy answered.

"Does he want me?"

"Yes."

"Tell him I'll be out in a moment," the girl said, slowly. The boy grinned, and retreated with his message.

The music struck up again for the dance.

"Come along, old girl," said the sailor, in his bluff, hearty way, offering his arm to her.

"I won't dance this time, thank you," the girl replied. "The room is so hot that it has made my head ache. I'm going out in the air for a few moments."

"But you'll come back again?"

"Yes," and with this assurance, the girl left the room. Outside the door she found the boy waiting.

"He's just round the corner," the boy said.

The girl, bareheaded and thinly clad as she was, heeded not the chill night-air, but with hasty steps, passed round the corner of the building. There, concealed in the shadow of a door, stood a stoutly-built young fellow, dressed roughly, and with a dark slouched hat pulled down over his eyes. His face was of the bulldog type, and plainly showed the bully and the shoulder-hitter.

Dennis King, or "Denny" King, as he was more commonly termed, was a good specimen of a large class who infest New York. Occupation he had none. Thief, pickpocket or burglar he was not, professionally, although it is more than probable that, when hard pushed and no other avenue for wealth open, he would not hesitate to "go through" any stranger who looked worth it, whom he might chance to come across, passing through his "stamping ground" late at night.

We said that he had no occupation; we are in the wrong. he had one calling; he was a politician—one of those useful men who could render naught ten votes of the opposing party by voting ten times himself. A perfect king of "repeaters" was Denny, and of especial value about election time. Not only useful as a voter, but also as a scarecrow to keep timid men away from the polls. For "Denny" was a professional fighter at times, when all other occupations failed him—a pugilist—one who toed the scratch within the "magic circle" marked by the stakes and ropes, and called, in the language of the sporting gentry, "the ring."

Denny was not only intimate with the political lights who owed their elections to him, and fellows of his kidney, but also with sundry great railroad kings who, in their squabbles for power, had called upon the rough-and-ready shoulder-hitters to assist them in seizing a railway office or in protecting their own from attacks by similar "gentlemen" hired by opposing parties.

So the strong-armed, quick-hitting Denny was not without influential friends.

But ill luck will come to the best of men; every man has his dark hour, no matter who or what he may be; and so it came to pass that Denny, despite his political influence, was "sent up" to the Island for six months, for being concerned in a drunken row and using a knife too freely. If he had been a hard-working mechanic who had allowed liquor to get the best of him, he probably would have got a year or two in the State Prison at Sing Sing.

Justice is a wonderful thing sometimes, and the most wonderful justice in all the world is that dispensed in the great city of New York, when the prisoner happens to have either wealthy or political friends to back his quarrel.

As we have stated, Denny, the exponent of the "manly art of self-defense," used a knife when he became involved in a quarrel; and it is a most astonishing thing that, in nine cases out of ten, all the professional pugilists in a difficulty do the same, plainly showing that in reality they place but little reliance upon their "manly art" to protect them from harm.

So, for six months the places that once knew the redoubtable Denny were to know him no more. But, on the night of which we write, of the six months only one had gone, and yet the "Island" bird was free.

"Why didn't you come into the saloon, Denny?" asked the girl, a slight shiver passing over her as the chill night air caught her in its cold embrace.

"An' git sent back to the Island?" growled the rough, in his hoarse, brutal voice.

"Why, is there danger of that?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"Of course; I've given the 'cops' leg bail. I wasn't a-goin' to break stone on the Island if there was a chance for to git off. So a couple of us fixed it with some friends of mine to lay off the Island in a boat. Then we fixed the guard an' slipped off. But, if any of the perlice that knows about my being sent up should put their peepers on me, I'd go back ag'in."

"You can't hide forever," the girl said, nervously, and shivering with cold.

"Some of the boys will square the job; election's coming on an' they'll need me," the bully replied, significantly. "But, in the first place, I want some money, for I'm broke."

"I haven't any."

"Then git some," responded Denny, coarsely. "Go for the old man. Johnny kin let you have some. It's a sin I think if a wife can't help her husband sometimes."

"Well, I'll try," the girl said, sadly.

"An' maybe I'll have some news for you in a week or so, if things work right. I think I'm the boy for to find out who your daddy an' mammy was."

"You don't mean it, Denny?" cried the girl, quickly.

"You bet I do; just 'stake' me, an' in a little while I'll square things."

"I'll be back in a moment."

Then the girl re-entered the saloon.

CHAPTER XI

THE STRANGER.

JENNIE—so the dance-house girl, the wife of the shoulder-hitter, was named—after entering the saloon went at once to the proprietor of the place, John Allen, who was leaning on the counter—idle just at that time, as the dancing had again commenced—watching the scene.

"Well, what is it, Jennie?" Allen asked, seeing the girl approach the counter and stand there as if in want of something.

"I want to ask a favor of you," the girl said, slowly.

"What is it?" The voice of the keeper of the dance-house was rough and hoarse, yet there was a tone of kindness in it when he addressed the girl.

"I want a little money if you can let me have it," the girl said, timidly.

"Well, you know that there ain't much coming to you?" Allen observed.

"Yes; I know that," the girl replied, quickly. "I want an advance, if you are willing to trust me."

"There ain't many in this room that I'd trust any further

than I could see 'em," Allen said, bluntly; "but I guess you ain't one of that kind. Look here, Jen', what do you want this money for, and how much do you want?"

"I think ten dollars will do, if you can spare it," the girl said, evading the first question.

"Oh, no tricks on me; what do you want the money for say?" The dance-house keeper was not easily deceived.

"Why, what difference does that make to you? what do you care what I do with the money as long as you are willing to give it to me?" the girl asked.

"'Cos I don't want you to make a fool of yourself," Allen replied. "I know what's up. Denny's back from the Island, isn't he?"

"Why should you think so?" asked the girl, nervously.

"Oh, you can't pull the wool over my eyes. I know you too well. Denny has come back and comes to you for money as usual. Why, Jennie, you poor little fool, the best thing I could do for you would not be to give you the ten dollars at all, but go to the nearest police station and set the 'cops' after that sucker you've married."

"You won't do that?" cried the girl, imploringly.

"No, I won't do it, of course, 'cos I never went back on a feller in my life, but it would be a good thing for you if I did," Allen said, in his blunt way. "See here, Jennie, I don't think I'll let you have this money. Won't do you any good nor him either; he'll only go and spend it for whisky, then come home and abuse you."

"I can stand it, but please give me the money," the girl pleaded.

"I tell you you're a fool to give it to him," Allen growled, drawing a roll of bills out of his wallet and beginning to count out the money.

"I think that Denny will behave himself now; he hasn't been ugly with me for a long time. He said, too, that he thinks he will be able to find out who my parents were."

"It's all a 'plant' for to git money out of you, Jennie. He's lying and he knows he's lying. But, here's the money. If you choose to be fool enough for to go and give it to him, why that's your look-out and not mine."

Allen handed over the money and the girl took it eagerly.

"I'm very much obliged," she said.

"Oh, that's all right," he answered. "You're a good girl, but you let that loafer make a fool of you."

"He's my husband, you know," the girl said, timidly.

"Be a good thing for you if somebody'd stick a knife in him one of these dark nights," Allen growled, half to himself, as the girl moved away. She did not hear the speech; she was thinking only of the fugitive from justice who waited outside.

A crash at the lower end of the room attracted the attention of the keeper of the dance-house.

A table had given way and come to the ground; the table had supported one of the great attractions of the Sailor's Rest—an Indian chief, who played upon the big drum.

The Indian was a brawny brave of the Yaneton Sioux tribe, who, in some mysterious way, had wandered from the plains of the far West to the great city of New York. There he had fallen under the notice of the dance-house keeper, and he had induced the Indian, by the promise of unlimited whisky, to take up his abode with him.

So, every night the Sioux chief, who bore the name of the Pawnee-killer, perched upon a table, played upon the drum for the amusement of the pleasure-seekers who patronized the Sailor's Rest.

It is probably hardly necessary to remark that the performance of the wild son of the prairie upon the big drum was not calculated to please musical ears, as his execution tended more to noise than to harmony; but the painted Indian was a curiosity, and the sailors who dropped in to enjoy the ho-

pitalities of the dance-house, were never weary of inviting the noble red-man to join them in a social glass, and to do the Sioux chief full justice, it is perhaps necessary to state that he never declined an invitation to drink; and that, when a question was put to him, no matter what the purport was, he invariably answered, "Rum."

The table had unexpectedly given away under the weight of the chief, and both he and the big drum had come to the floor all in a heap.

The Indian picked himself up, responded to the question of was he hurt? by the usual answer, "Rum," and again commenced operations on the drum.

Allen, looking around, beheld a stranger, clad in dark clothes, standing by the end of the bar.

"Are you the keeper of the place?" the stranger asked.

Allen looked at the man suspiciously for a moment; it was his nature to be ever on his guard.

"Yes; what of it?" he said.

"Nothing; only I want a word or two with you in private," the stranger replied, carelessly.

"Well, I guess you kin have it; there ain't any law ag'in' it, that I knows on," but Allen in his own mind wondered what the man wanted.

"Do you know a man called Tom Bishop?" the stranger asked, leaning over the counter.

Allen stared at the question, then pondered over it for a moment before he answered:

"Well, I s'pose I know him," he said; "what of it?"

Allen was suspicious; like all men whose actions place them in perilous positions, he ever dreaded danger.

"Oh, nothing particular; he'll be here pretty soon."

"What! to-night?" The keeper of the dance-house seemed a little disturbed.

"Yes, within half an hour."

"What's the trouble?" Allen said, just a little nervous, and he glanced around the room, as if to see who his visitors were; "anybody wanted?"

"No."

"Ain't got any thing to do with me?"

"No."

"Well, I thought it couldn't be," said Allen, evidently feeling relieved. "Every thing is straight as far as I know. I don't 'low wrong in my house. The perlice is down on me, I know, but they ain't got any reason to be. 'Tain't my fault if the boys get into a muss once in a while. I'd like to see the house where they don't. I keep as quiet as we as there is in the district, an' I'll bet stamps on it."

"Nothing to trouble you. Bishop comes with a few friends on a little business."

Again the landlord looked around the room.

"But I don't see anybody here—"

"It isn't that," interrupted the stranger. "It's a little outside business. He'll want a private room and a bottle of wine. The wine is to be doctored."

"Yes, but I don't want to git into—"

"Oh, it's all right!" cried the stranger, interrupting Allen, "he'll explain every thing when he comes. By the way, you needn't say that I put you up to the job. Maybe he wouldn't like my interfering in the matter, because that's his affair, while I'm on a different lay. Now I want to fix something with you. Let me whisper in your ear."

Allen bent over the bar while the stranger whispered to him.

"What do you want to do that for?" exclaimed Allen, in great astonishment, when the stranger had finished.

"That's my little game," replied the other. "Now if a ten-dollar note is any inducement to you—"

"Yes, but there ain't a-going to be any trouble?" the dance-house keeper said, suspiciously.

"No; that's all right."

It's a bargain, then."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BARGAIN.

THE carriage containing Coralie and the old savant, Bishop and Van Rensselaer, rolled leisurely onward. The driver did not seem to be in any great hurry.

Conversation there was none, and the time passed slowly away until, at last, the carriage halted.

"Tell the old gentleman that he must remain here for a few moments; it will not be long," Van Rensselaer said, in the ear of Coralie. "My friend will not expect us so soon, and I must prepare him." Then Van Rensselaer descended from the carriage.

Coralie delivered the message to the savant.

"I think I'll get out and see where we are," Bishop whispered to Hartright.

"I do not feel the slightest curiosity," the savant answered. "All that I wish is to see the face of this girl."

Bishop dismounted from the carriage.

The coach was standing in a narrow, dark street.

Van Rensselaer stood a few paces down the street; Bishop joined him. The two removed their dominos and masks and tossed them into the street.

"The dance-house is down at the corner," Bishop said. "But ain't you afraid that the old man will see your face? or are you going to keep out of his way?"

"I am all prepared," Van Rensselaer answered, and he drew a full beard from his pocket, which corresponded in color with his hair. "I shall put this on, and as I don't intend to venture into the light, he will hardly detect the disguise."

"That's a good idea," Bishop said, in evident admiration.

"Let us get on."

"Come ahead."

Van Rensselaer replaced the beard in his pocket, and the two walked down the street.

Near the corner Bishop halted in front of a door.

"This is the side-door," he said; "we had better carry him in here. He'll 'tumble' to our game if he sees the dance-house."

"Yes, that is well thought of."

"Just wait here, and I'll bring the keeper of the dance-house, and then we can fix matters."

Van Rensselaer nodded his head and Bishop disappeared around the corner.

"Why did this man return from India?" Van Rensselaer muttered, as he paced restlessly up and down. "Just as I thought myself safe—that no power on earth could shake me—this man springs into my path with the paper that has been buried from sight for three years. Oh, cursed luck!" and he ground his teeth in anguish; "why did not the thugs in the thicket, or the tigers in the jungle, prey upon this man and thus have kept him from my path? But the paper shall be mine!"

Bishop had entered the saloon, and, from the manner in which he saluted the dance-house keeper, it was plain that he was an old acquaintance.

"How's business, John?" he asked.

"Middlin'; take something?" Allen said.

"No, thank you; got a little business on hand here to-night."

"Ah?"

"Yes; want a private room and a bottle of wine," Bishop said, carelessly. "I suppose you can 'fix' the wine so as to make a fellow feel a little sleepy after he drinks it?" and Bishop leaned over the counter and lowered his tone as he put the question.

"Well, to oblige you, Mr. Bishop, I s'pose I might be able to fix up something of that sort. Of course we don't make a practice of doin' such things, you know."

"Oh, of course not."

"What is your little game, anyway?" asked Allen, suddenly.

Bishop winked at him.

"Can't tell tales out of school, you know."

"Nothing dangerous?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, I'll fix it."

"I've got a friend outside, who pays the piper," Bishop said. "Just come outside and he'll make every thing all correct."

Allen took his hat from under the counter, called to his assistant to take his place, and followed Bishop into the street.

They turned the corner and joined Van Rensselaer, who had been impatiently waiting for them.

"I've explained to this gentleman what we want," Bishop said to Van Rensselaer, referring to Allen.

"Glad to see you, sir. I guess we can arrange things," Allen said, ducking his head to Van Rensselaer.

"You understand; we want a private room and a bottle of wine?" the young man said.

"Yes, a fixed one," Allen observed, knowingly; "one of the kind which makes folks sleepy after they drink the liquor."

"Exactly; that is what we want; but, understand, nothing to endanger life."

"Oh, blazes! do you s'pose I'm a fool?" cried Allen, bluntly. "Do you s'pose I want to bring the police down onto my place, say?"

"How much will this be?"

"Cost you a ten-spot, Judge, and that's dirt cheap. If you wasn't a friend to Mr. Bishop, I'd charge you twenty; but seein' how it is, I want to be as reasonable as I kin."

Van Rensselaer placed the ten-dollar note in the hand of the dance-house keeper.

"There you are."

"All co-rect; you're a gent, every time."

"And what room shall we take?" Bishop asked.

"You know where No. 1 is?" Allen asked.

"Yes, I believe so; the first door on the left after turning the corner, isn't it?" Bishop said.

"Yes; up one flight."

"I know where it is. You can open this side door, so that we can go in here, can't you?"

"Of course. I say, gents," exclaimed Allen, suddenly, "you ain't a-goin' to do any thing to kick up a row in the house, are you? The police are down on me now, you know, and it would be just old pie for them if they could git hold of any chance for to shet me up."

"Don't you be afraid; we shan't make a bit of noise," Bishop said.

"All right; I'll go and open the door," and the dance-house keeper departed.

"Better wait till he gets the door open, and get a light before we bring the old gentleman in," Bishop observed.

"My back will be to the old man, and with the beard on, I'll risk the chance of a discovery," Van Rensselaer said.

"Better just go up-stairs so as to be familiar with the way."

"I will."

Then the two heard the noise of bolts moving in their sockets; the key turned in the lock, the door opened, and Allen appeared.

"Get a light, John, won't you?" Bishop said.

"All right," and the dance-house keeper retreated into the darkness of the entry.

"This is a pretty hard place, isn't it?" Van Rensselaer asked.

"Yes, just about as hard as they make 'em. Heaven help

the poor sailor who gets in here with a few dollars in his pocket. If they can't get his money away by any other means, they drug his liquor, then rob him and toss him out in the street. In the morning, half the time the robbed man can't remember where he was the night before, and if he does remember, and tries to get his money back, why they bring up a whole host of witnesses to either swear he was never in the place, or else that he hadn't any money to pay for the drinks he ordered when he first came in."

"I should think that the police would break up such dens."

"They break them up?" and Bishop laughed in contempt. "Why, these men run the police force, and elect the magistrate who sits on the bench to try 'em! There's too much money to be made out of just such places as this for to shut 'em up. When honest men rule New York, perhaps there'll be a stop put to this sort of thing. But as long as the shoulder-hitters run the machine it will never be done."

The return of the dance-house keeper with a lighted candle, put a stop to the conversation.

"Come on, gents," Allen said.

The two followed him up-stairs, turned the corner, and entered room No. 1.

"This will do," Van Rensselaer said; then he took the candle from the hand of Allen, and the three retraced their steps to the street again.

"Call them," Van Rensselaer said.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEATING 'GAINST THE BARS.

OBEIDIENT to Bishop's call, Coralie and the old savant descended from the carriage.

Van Rensselaer—the heavy beard concealing half of his face, his hat pulled down over his brows, and a lighted candle in his hand—met them in the doorway.

He turned as they approached and led the way up the stairs.

Coralie and the old man followed, while Bishop remained behind at the foot of the stairs; but, as soon as the light of the candle disappeared around the angle of the wall, he ascended the stairs with cautious steps.

The young girl did not for a moment dream that the dark bearded man with the candle was the wealthy New Yorker, David Van Rensselaer.

David opened the door of the room known as No. 1. A candle was burning within on the table.

Coralie and Hartright entered the room.

It was plainly—scantily furnished. A common table and two chairs were in the center of the apartment; a torn and rusty-looking sofa against the wall, and that was all.

Coralie cast a glance of amazement around; evidently she had not expected to behold so desolate a place. But before she could express her astonishment in words, if her intention had been to do so, Van Rensselaer spoke.

"Can I speak with you, Miss?"

And without waiting for her reply he proceeded into the entry.

Coralie started; she had recognized the voice, but the disguise puzzled her. Rapidly though she recovered her composure, and turned toward the old gentleman.

"Will you excuse me for a moment?" she asked.

"Certainly," he replied, and he seated himself beside the table.

"I will return in a moment."

Then Coralie passed into the entry, closing the door behind her.

Van Rensselaer had placed the candle upon a little stand

Beadle's Dime Library.

which stood in one corner of the entry, and with folded arms stood regarding her.

A quick, anxious glance Coralie cast into his impassive face; naught there could she read.

"David Van Rensselaer, have you deceived me?" she cried, a sudden, horrible suspicion taking possession of her mind.

"Deceived you—how?" he asked, coolly.

"This place," she answered, slowly, her eyes wandering around, noting the squalid walls and the discolored, uneven floor.

"Well, what of it?"

"Where am I?" she demanded, abruptly, and a flash of angry light shone in her clear eyes.

"What earthly difference can that possibly make to you?" he asked, evading the question; there was a slight touch of sarcasm apparent in his voice.

"David Van Rensselaer, you have deceived me! I am sure of it!" she exclaimed, a crimson flush gathering upon the brow and cheeks hid by the dark veil.

"If you are sure of it, I will not attempt to argue the point with you," Van Rensselaer said, in his calm, quiet way, and, as he spoke, he removed the beard from his face.

"And why did you assume a disguise?"

"Oh, that is common at a masquerade," he answered.

"Do not trifle with me!" the girl exclaimed, annoyed at his tone and manner. "We are not at a masquerade now."

"Yet you wear the disguise which you assumed at the masquerade; the veil even still conceals your features."

"David Van Rensselaer, will you answer my question?" she cried, impatiently. "Tell me at once what and where is this place, and for what purpose have you tricked me into coming hither?"

"How very curious you are to-night," he replied, in a tone of banter.

"Will you answer me?" she demanded, sternly.

"Yes."

There was a peculiar glitter in his eyes as he pronounced the simple word—a glitter, snake-like in its gleam. For the first time the suspicion came into the mind of the young girl that Van Rensselaer, with all his courtly polish, roused to action would prove a dangerous foe.

"You have asked me direct questions, and you shall have direct answers," he said, coldly, quietly, but with a strange, metallic ring in his voice. "In the first place, I have deceived you. I have used you as an instrument by which to accomplish certain things. I wished the old man in yonder room to come here; by your aid he has been induced to come. Now I wish you to aid me still further. In a few minutes a servant will bring a bottle of wine into yonder room. You must induce the old gentleman to drink, but you must be careful not to drink yourself, for the wine is drugged."

"Drugged? Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed the girl, in horror.

Van Rensselaer went on in his speech without apparently heeding the interruption.

"After the wine takes effect, which it will do speedily, and the old man falls asleep, you must warn me. I shall be in waiting outside the door; then take your place in the carriage. In a few minutes I will bring the old man. You shall be driven to your home, and he to his. That is all."

"What terrible purpose have you in view?" Coralie asked, breathlessly.

"The folly of asking such a question as that!" Van Rensselaer exclaimed, impatiently. "What terrible purpose I have! The old man drinks a glass of wine, then falls asleep. When he awakes he will find himself upon his own bed in his hotel. The events of the night, dating from the masquerade, will appear to him only as a disordered dream."

"You can not deceive me!" the girl cried, suddenly. "You have some deep purpose in this. This is no foolish

wager, but a subtle plot. I can not guess what it is; I do not care to know. But, one thing I will do, and that is, baffle your design. I will return to yonder room, not to urge the stranger to drink your drugged wine, but to reveal to him the plot of which he has been the victim, and aid him to escape from it."

"Golden words from lips of flesh," Van Rensselaer said, dryly, not a whit alarmed. "What a shame it is that you can not carry out such an admirable design."

"And who will prevent me from carrying it out?" she asked, scornfully.

"Your humble servant," he replied quietly.

"You?"

"No one else."

"You shall not fetter my tongue!" she cried, quickly. "You have been skillful enough to entrap me into aiding your scheme thus far, but now my eyes are open, and I will act as your decoy no longer. I will warn this stranger of his danger, and save him from it."

She turned as if to go, but Van Rensselaer's strong hand was upon her wrist and stayed her.

"Oh, no, you will not," he said, not a trace of excitement in his voice. "You will do exactly as I say—carry out my plans to the letter."

"Never!" the girl cried, indignantly, making an effort to free herself from his grasp.

"I tell you that you will do my bidding. Do you know that you are in one of the worst dens in all great New York—a dance-house in Water street? If you doubt my words, descend the stairs and you can behold the festive scene by simply opening a door. If you refuse to do as I say, I will tear the veil from your face and call the rabble below to look upon the famous actress, Coralie York. To-morrow the report of your visit to John Allen's den will be in every newspaper in the city, and a rare bit of news it will be for your friends."

Coralie's heart sunk within her, as she comprehended how utterly she was in the power of the man who held her wrist with a grasp of iron.

Her breath came thick and fast; vainly she tried to devise some method of escape.

"Come, your answer," he said; "why hesitate? Do you think that I want to murder this man?"

"But, why do you do this?" she asked, almost mechanically.

"That is my business, and not yours," he answered, harshly; "but I swear to you that I mean him no harm."

"Oh, what a dreadful scheme you have lured me into," the girl moaned.

"You consent?"

"I must; I am helpless in your power," she murmured.

"The wine will be here soon; remember my instructions."

With a heavy heart, Coralie re-entered the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INDIAN CHIEF.

VAN RENSSELAER watched her until the closing door hid her from his sight, then a scornful smile came over his face.

"The foolish girl," he muttered, "to attempt to measure wits with me. I laid my plans too carefully for that. Decoy she said: no longer act as my decoy; how aptly she put it. She could not have named the part I have forced her to play better. She, in this affair, is my decoy-duck to lure the field-bird within range of my fire. She would fain spread her wings and fly—to carry out the simile—but I have clipped them too closely," and Van Rensselaer laughed merrily to himself.

"Now for Bishop and the wine," he muttered.

And even with the word, Bishop's head came peering round the angle in the entry.

"All correct?" he asked, cautiously.

"Yes, she was a little obstinate when she found out the programme, but at last she yielded and agreed to carry it out."

"You persuaded her, then?"

"Yes, persuaded her," and Van Rensselaer laughed—a grim laugh with more of scorn than of merriment in it. "I threatened to tear the vail from her face and call up the dance-house rabble below to a look at her."

"And that fetched her?" Bishop asked, in wonder.

"Yes, instantly."

"She must amount to something?" and Bishop in his own mind wondered who she could possibly be.

"She amounts to enough to wish that all New York shouldn't know that she has visited this dance-house to-night," Van Rensselaer answered.

"Do you know that her voice is very familiar to me?" Bishop said, thoughtfully. "I heard her speak when she got out of the carriage and I'll take my affidavit that I've heard her voice somewhere before. I've been puzzling my brains to remember where it was."

"And can't you discover?"

"No."

Van Rensselaer looked relieved. He did not care to have Bishop discover who Coralie was.

"Probably only a chance resemblance," he said, carelessly. "But now will you tell the landlord to send up the wine?"

"Yes; I'll bring it up myself; it's just as well that the old buffer shouldn't see any of the dance-house people or any one of them see him."

"That is a wise thought of yours."

Hardly had Van Rensselaer finished his speech when the wick of the candle, which he had placed upon the little stand in the entry, with a hiss and sputter, went out. The candle had burned low and had fallen through into the socket.

"From light to darkness," said Bishop, sententiously.

"It makes no difference," Van Rensselaer replied.

"Not a mite; particularly as I've got a bull's-eye lantern in my pocket."

"That's lucky!"

"Always just as well to have such things along in a game of this kind," Bishop said, sagaciously.

"Hush!" cried Van Rensselaer, suddenly, grasping Bishop by the shoulder.

That gentleman had just struck a match upon the sole of his boot and ignited the lantern wick.

"What's the matter?" he asked, in a whisper.

"I thought I heard a noise upon the stairs."

"A noise!"

"Yes, as if some one was ascending cautiously."

"What reason could any one have?"

"Only to spy upon us."

"That's so, by jingo!"

The two listened attentively for a few moments.

All was still, except that now and then the shrill squeak of a violin and the shuffle of heavy feet accompanied by boisterous peals of laughter came indistinctly up the staircase.

"Well—I don't hear any thing," Bishop said, in a whisper, after a long pause.

"Because the person coming up has stopped, alarmed perhaps lest we should discover him," Van Rensselaer said. "If my ears did not deceive me some one is playing the spy upon us."

Again there was a long silence, broken at last by Van Rensselaer clutching Bishop by the arm and whispering cautiously in his ear:

"Hark! didn't you hear it that time? Didn't you hear that board creak? I tell you some one is watching us!" Van Rensselaer said, in a tone wherein no doubt was expressed.

"It looks like it," Bishop answered.

"Suppose we seize the intruder and see who it is?"

"Flash the lantern upon his face?" Bishop asked.

"Yes."

"It sounds like a woman's footsteps," Bishop said, after listening for a moment.

The soft footfalls coming slowly but steadily up the rotten broken stairs could now be distinctly heard by both watchers on the upper platform.

"All ready?" Van Rensselaer questioned, as the sound of the footsteps came nearer and nearer.

"Yes."

A few seconds more and the footsteps, almost as noiseless in their tread as the velvet paws of a cat, fell upon the boards of the landing.

The two ambushed in the darkness, almost held their breath as though they feared that the very sound of their breathing might betray their presence, and warn the stealthy-treading spy.

A few seconds more and the light of the bull's-eye lantern flashed out upon the darkness of the entry.

A sudden spring, and Van Rensselaer grappled with the velvet-footed intruder.

He had sprung upon the dark figure before the light of the lantern had fully made known to him who or what it was. Great, therefore, was his astonishment to grasp a man robed in a skin-dress, who swayed unsteadily to and fro without making an effort to escape.

Then Bishop flashed the bright blaze of the lantern full upon the face of the stealthy stranger. Van Rensselaer beheld the features of an Indian.

He released his prisoner in astonishment, and Bishop chuckled quietly to himself.

"An Indian!" Van Rensselaer muttered, in wonder.

The Indian essayed to straighten himself up, which was quite a difficult feat for the noble son of the wilderness to accomplish, for his unsteady gait plainly betrayed that he had been indulging in the fire-water of the white man. Then he beat his breast with his hand as he proclaimed his name and tribe:

"Big chief—Pawnee-killer—Yancton Sioux!" said the Indian, in a deep, guttural voice.

Van Rensselaer looked at Bishop for an explanation.

"It's all right," Bishop exclaimed; "he's only a tame Indian that hangs out round the dance-house; perfectly harmless; drunk 'bout all the time."

"Big Injine!" exclaimed the savage, gravely; "like white man heap—me want rum," and the noble red-man looked inquiringly into the face of the two who had so unceremoniously accosted him.

"Do you suppose this fellow could have overheard any of our conversation as he ascended the stairs?" Van Rensselaer asked, in a low tone of Bishop.

"Oh, no; he wouldn't have understood if he had overheard. He only knows a few words of English. He's only got about three letters in his alphabet, R-U-M—rum."

"Rum!" ejaculated the savage, with great dignity.

"Git!" replied Bishop, laconically, waving the Indian away.

With unsteady steps the savage departed. Down along the entry he went, and his reeling figure was soon lost in the darkness.

"Go for the wine while I keep watch outside the door," Van Rensselaer said.

Cautiously the two stole along the entry. One to the door of the room; the other to the stairway, which he descended

CHAPTER XV.

A STORY OF THE PAST.

WHEN the young girl re-entered the room, she found the old man seated by the table, his head resting upon his hand, the elbow on the table.

With a smile upon his face, the old man lifted up his head at the approach of the girl.

"I am sorry that I have been obliged to keep you waiting," she said, coming near and resting her hand upon the table.

"I am very patient," he replied, "and in such a quest as I am now engaged in, do not mind a few hours' delay, much less a few minutes."

"You say that my voice reminds you of some one whom you used to know?" she asked, thoughtfully, her mind having returned to the strange words of the old man.

"Yes; but pray be seated. I have quite a long story to tell you," he said.

"A story?"

"Yes, of a young girl whom I once loved as though she had been my own child. It is she that you put me in mind of. A child that I once dearly loved—that for years I have lost sight of."

"I will listen," the girl said, seating herself by the table as she spoke.

"My story commences twenty-five years ago. I was a young man then, living in my native village, a small place named Sandy Creek, in the upper part of this State. Side by side with me grew up a young girl named Sarah Gordon. As boy and girl we played together, the houses of our parents joined. She was a pretty, blue-eyed, golden-haired fairy. When I came to manhood I discovered that the feeling of friendship I had had for my pretty playmate had ripened into the warmer passion which the world calls love. I did not openly tell my passion, but in a hundred little acts tried to show the maiden of my heart that she was loved. And at last, just as I had begun to fancy from her manner that my attentions were not displeasing to her, a young New Yorker chanced to come to our village. He was a young, dashy, handsome fellow, with plenty of money, which he threw away as carelessly as though he was the heir to a gold-mine. He caught the eye and fancy of the pretty Sarah. He wooed and won her, and in one short month after Philip Van Rensselaer came to the village of Sandy Creek, Sarah Gordon became his wife."

Coralie started at the name.

"Philip Van Rensselaer!" she murmured, to herself, "the father of David! What a strange revelation is this! What am I about to hear?"

"Six months after his marriage, Philip Van Rensselaer was summoned to New York by his father. Two months before that time, the father and mother of his country bride died suddenly, one after the other; both were well advanced in years. When Van Rensselaer was called so suddenly to New York, he entreated me to see that his young wife wanted for nothing during his absence. Neither the wife nor husband guessed the love that had filled my heart; they thought of me as a friend only. I accepted the trust, for I had but one wish in the world, and that was to see her happy."

"Month after month went by, yet Philip Van Rensselaer came not back to his young and sorrowing wife; neither did he write. At last Heaven sent a child to bless the heart of the deserted wife, but ere the happy mother could kiss the lips of her babe, her own were cold in death."

"Then I set out for New York in person, determined to seek out Philip Van Rensselaer, and call him to an account for his desertion of his child-wife. When I arrived in New York I found that Van Rensselaer was absent from home—gone on a European tour. I waited until he returned. When he came back he brought a wife with him. He had married a

second time, forced to it by his father. He implored me to keep his first marriage secret and to take charge of his child. I consented, for I loved the child for its mother's sake. He agreed to send each year to Sandy Creek a certain sum for the child's support, and further promised in time to come, to provide for her handsomely."

"Satisfied with this, I returned to my home; found a cousin of the mother, who, being a poor woman, gladly agreed to take charge of the child. Five years passed away, then I went to India—a wealthy uncle having died childless, and thus given me means to gratify my passion for traveling in the far East."

"I was absent from my home five years. Letters, of course, came few and far between. When I returned, I discovered, to my dismay, that the woman in whose care I had placed the child had removed—no one knew whither. Despite my utmost endeavor I could not discover the slightest clue to her whereabouts. At last, giving up search and mourning the child as one lost to me forever, I returned again to India. Coming again to my native land, in the first week I meet you, and in the tones of your voice I recognize the voice of my long-lost child, Alice Gordon Van Rensselaer."

In strange agitation Coralie gazed upon the stranger.

"It can not be," she murmured, with white lips and a beating heart; "the name of the woman with whom you placed the child?"

"Gordon, a cousin of the mother."

Sorrowfully the girl bowed her head.

"You are the child?" he asked, earnestly.

"No, I am not the one you seek," the girl said, slowly.

"You are sure of it?" the old man asked, a shade of disappointment gathering on his face.

"Yes; when you told the story of the missing child, it seemed to me like the history of my own life, for I, too, am an orphan."

"And you never knew your parents?"

"No; but the woman who reared me was called Wilson. When you spoke the name of Gordon you crushed all the hope from my heart. I am surely not the one you seek."

"I am very much disappointed," the old savant said, slowly. "I felt sure the moment the tones of your voice fell upon my ears that in you I had found my long-lost protege, little Alice. But, you have promised that I shall see your face."

"Yes, and I will keep that promise on one condition," the girl replied; "I did not dream what I was doing when I commenced this folly."

"I will accept the condition, whatever it is," the savant said, quickly.

"It is a simple one; that you forget my face the moment after you have seen it."

"Willingly, if you wish it. Should I meet you in the street to-morrow, I will pass you by as an utter stranger."

"That is all I ask."

A low tap sounded on the door.

Coralie opened the door and received a small tray, on which were a bottle of wine and two glasses.

She closed the door and placed the tray on the table.

"You will drink with me," she said, with a powerful effort nerving herself to play the part which Van Rensselaer's art had forced upon her.

"Yes; but you have promised that I shall see your face," he said.

"Drink first, and then I will keep my promise," she replied, filling the glasses.

"Good, and my toast shall be, happiness to you," said the old man, gallantly emptying his glass at a draught.

Then he noticed that her glass was still full.

"You do not drink," he said.

"I have a reason," she replied.

Dreamily the old man passed his hand over his forehead.

"Now your promise," he said.

With a rapid movement she threw back the heavy veil which hid her face.

A single moment the old man glared into the beautiful face of the young girl; then he rose slowly, and with difficulty, to his feet. The drugged wine was beginning to take effect.

"What do I see?" he cried, in broken accents; "the face of Sarah Gordon, who married Philip Van Rensselaer—but, no, I dream—I am sleepy."

Slowly he staggered back, beating the air, dreamily, with his outstretched hands.

"Alice—my Alice!" he murmured, as he sunk upon the sofa.

With a last effort, he threw open the light overcoat, which he wore buttoned over his breast.

"I am sleepy," he murmured, "sleepy—Alice—"

And with the word he extended himself upon the sofa, and sunk into a deep slumber, the effect of the powerful drug contained in the wine.

The quick eyes of the girl caught sight of a folded, legal-looking paper in the breast-pocket of his overcoat.

"That is what Van Rensselaer is in search of!" she cried suddenly; "but I will foil him and preserve it."

CHAPTER XVI.

A SUDDEN APPEARANCE.

CORALIE had risen to her feet when she beheld the strange effect of the potent drug upon the old man, and when her eyes beheld the legal-looking paper projecting from the breast-pocket of his overcoat, her quick wits at once conjectured that possibly it was what Van Rensselaer was in search of. For that he had some powerful motive for acting as he had in the matter she was sure. No common cause could actuate him.

From the old man's story it was evident that he was strangely interested in the Van Rensselaer family.

Duped as she had been by David, and forced to carry out his designs despite herself, she saw here a chance to baffle his plans, perhaps in the end defeat them altogether.

If the paper was indeed the object of which Van Rensselaer was in quest, what a triumph it would be for her to frustrate him and preserve the perhaps precious document.

With parted lips and a beating heart, Coralie stood in the center of the dingy room and looked upon the sleeping man. The thought came to her mind that Van Rensselaer might be watching her through the key-hole of the door. She was determined to secure the paper hidden in the old man's pocket, but to baffle Van Rensselaer's design, he must not suspect that she had taken it.

Coralie thought and acted quickly. She advanced to the old man and bent over him as if to assure herself that he was really sleeping. Then, with a rapid movement, she drew the folded paper from her pocket and thrust it into her bosom. Her back being to the door, the action was concealed from any one who might be watching there.

A smile of triumph shone in the clear eyes of the girl as her fingers closed over the paper.

"It is mine," she murmured. "Now, keen plotter, if this is what you are in search of, your quest will be a fruitless one. The tool you have chosen shall wound your hand,

instead of aiding you in your design. He laughs best who laughs last; to-night it was your turn, to-morrow it will be mine."

Then she drew her veil down over her face again and walked straight to the door of the apartment.

As she approached it, it opened and Van Rensselaer appeared. As she had guessed, he had been on the watch.

"Does he sleep?" he asked, casting an anxious glance toward the couch where the motionless form of the old man was extended.

"Yes."

"Wait for me in the carriage. I shall not be long," he said.

She simply bowed her head, but made no reply. She left the room, walked along the passage-way and descended to the street.

The hack now stood before the door

"You need not wait for the others," Coralie said, determined to put Van Rensselaer to all the inconvenience in her power. Then she told the hackman to drive her to the corner of Twenty-third street and Broadway; something whispered to her that it was best not to give her address to the man.

Coralie entered the carriage, and the hackman, tired of waiting and anxious to get home, drove off without thinking for a moment that there was any thing wrong in so doing.

The young girl laughed, in triumph, as the carriage rolled on and she felt the paper safe within her bosom.

After Coralie's departure, Van Rensselaer turned to Bishop, who stood just outside the door.

"Keep watch at the door outside and prevent any one from disturbing me," he said.

"All right," Bishop answered.

Then Van Rensselaer closed the door, and was alone with his victim. With stealthy steps he approached the old man, yet there was little need of caution, for Hartright was as incapable of motion as the gorged Indian serpent supine in its native jungles.

"The drug has worked well enough," he muttered, as he looked upon the sleeper. He proceeded at once to search his pockets, but no will rewarded his efforts.

"By heaven! he has not brought it with him!" Van Rensselaer muttered, in wrath. "I shall only have my labor for my pains. Can he have intrusted it to other hands?" And his brows grew dark as he pondered over the question. "Impossible! he surely would not trust so precious a paper out of his possession. It may be concealed some where about his person."

Again Van Rensselaer bent over the sleeper. As he passed his hand carefully over the broad chest of the old man he felt something crumple at his touch, concealed within the vest.

"Aha! I have it!" he muttered.

A gleam of joy came over his features.

"There are some papers secreted within the lining of his vest," he continued. "At last I succeed. It's lucky that I thought to bring a knife with me." And, even as he spoke, he drew a sharp-edged bowie-knife from its sheath, which was fastened to a belt buckled around his waist.

He unfastened the old man's vest and threw it open; then, with the keen-edged knife, he carefully ripped open the lining. Two folded papers lay exposed to his hand.

Quickly he carried them to the table, and, by the light of the candle, examined them. A shade of disappointment came over his face as he saw what they were.

"Neither one is the will," he muttered, angrily. "What are they? 'Philip Van Rensselaer to Sarah Gordon.' A marriage certificate. The date, 1842. This is the proof of my father's first marriage. 'A record of the birth and baptism of

Alice Gordon Van Rensselaer. That is the child mentioned in the will; the heir under that will to just one-half of my father's property. That villain, Keene, deceived me. These are the papers which, three years ago, I stained my soul with crime to destroy. The papers which I burned up, which were in Keene's possession, were only copies; these are the originals. Oh! what a cursed idiot I have been! That crime was a useless one."

Then Van Rensselaer was silent for a moment, buried in thought.

"Even if these papers are destroyed," he said, slowly, communing with himself, "this man can prove the identity of the child, Alice, if she be living, and something whispers me that she is. Her appearance, the will—which has escaped me—and his evidence would give this Alice half our fortune. These valuable papers are mine, but this old man could possibly prove the child's identity without them. But if he should never wake from this deathlike sleep?" And Van Rensselaer glared hastily around him as he put the question which boded murder, as though he feared to see some shadowy form step from the darkness of the corners and answer his speech.

"Why should he not die here and now?" he muttered. "He is an old man, on the very verge of the grave; few years—perhaps hours—of life can he call his own. But the means?" Van Rensselaer again glared round him with a half-shudder.

Suddenly the thought came to him.

"Suffocation!" he cried, in accents hardly above a whisper. "By simply winding my coat around his head he will die almost without a struggle. No marks to tell of the manner of his death. It must be so, this one crime, and then I'll stain my hand in blood no more. I can easily escape from the house. When they discover the body they will imagine that his death was produced by the drug in the liquor, and, to save themselves from suspicion, they will hush the matter up in some way."

With stealthy steps, Van Rensselaer approached the door and listened for a moment. Not a sound could he hear.

"If he should look through the keyhole, as I did?" the young man muttered, referring to Bishop.

And acting on the thought, he took from his pocket his handkerchief and fastened it around the knob of the door in such a manner that it hung down over the keyhole.

"It will be difficult to watch my movements from the outside now, I think," he said, with a grim smile. Then he removed his coat, and, holding it in his hands, carefully approached the helpless man extended on the sofa. Murder was in Van Rensselaer's heart and hand.

He bent over his destined victim, when a slight noise as though a mouse had run across the floor behind him, attracted his attention.

With a nervous shiver, for conscious guilt makes even the firm-nerved, stout-hearted villain liable to sudden fear when alone and surrounded by deathlike stillness, Van Rensselaer turned; the coat had dropped from his hands upon the head of the sleeping man.

In the center of the room stood the Indian chief, erect like a statue, the dim light of the candle falling full upon his painted face.

A specter fresh from the shades below could hardly have startled the guilty soul of Van Rensselaer more than the sudden appearance of the Pawnee-Killer.

How he had gained access to the apartment was easily explained, for a small trap-door stood open just beyond the table and a flight of steps led down from it into the regions below.

In an instant it flashed upon Van Rensselaer's mind that

the Indian had played the spy upon him, although he could not understand why the savage should do so.

The Indian had taken the precious papers from the table where Van Rensselaer had placed them; and held them firmly gripped in his left hand.

A single moment the New Yorker glared upon him; then, with a cry of rage, he plucked the bowie-knife from its sheath and sprung upon the intruder.

Quick as a cat, the savage evaded the blow by springing to one side, and then, as Van Rensselaer passed, carried on by his violent rush, he dealt him a terrible blow under the right ear that felled Van Rensselaer like a log to the floor, senseless.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRAP-DOOR.

WHEN Van Rensselaer recovered from the effects of the terrible blow he found himself in darkness.

Slowly, little by little, his senses returned to him. He still felt a dull pain in his head, and on carrying his hand to it, discovered that there was a terrible lump under his ear where the iron-like knuckles of the savage had struck him.

Van Rensselaer rose to his feet, his brain still swimming from the effects of the blow.

As we have said, he was in the darkness. How long he had lain upon the floor in his faint he knew not, for he felt certain that he was still in the room where he had fallen.

"Bishop!" he called, and his voice sounded harsh and unnatural.

The door opened, Van Rensselaer heard the creaking of the hinges, but no ray of light came into the room, which was not to be wondered at, for the entry-way was as dark as the unlighted room.

"Hallo! in the dark?" Bishop said, in astonishment, as he looked into the room, speaking in a cautious tone; as if afraid of waking the sleeper. "What have you been doing all this time? I got about tired of waiting. What made you put the light out?"

"Have you the lantern still lighted?" Van Rensselaer asked.

"Yes."

Bishop sent the bright rays flashing full upon Van Rensselaer's face, and as he caught sight of his pale and haggard features he uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Why, you look like a ghost!" he cried.

Van Rensselaer replied not. He walked to the table, discovered that the candle was still there, and drawing a match from his pocket lit it.

As the dim rays illuminated the room another cry of astonishment came from Bishop's lips.

The sofa was empty; the sleeping man was gone!

Van Rensselaer's face grew paler still as he saw that both the savant and the valuable papers had disappeared.

"I am beaten," he muttered, in sullen anger.

"I don't understand," Bishop said, in wonder: "what have you done with the old man? I'll swear that no one passed by me, for I've kept close watch at the door ever since you came in." And as he spoke his eyes wandered around the room in search of another door; but the bare wall, unbroken, except by two windows securely barred by heavy shutters, alone met his gaze. He saw no visible outlet except by the two windows, and, from the thick coat of dust upon the bolts, it was evident that weeks if not months had elapsed since they had been opened.

"The events which have happened in this room since I entered it seem like a terrible dream more than like reality," Van Rensselaer said, in a husky voice, evidently laboring under strong emotions. "As I stood by the sleeping man, I

heard a slight noise behind me; I turned and beheld that drunken Indian whom we encountered in the entry-way, standing in the center of the floor. When I advanced to him, he struck me a terrible blow under the ear which felled me senseless to the floor. When I came to my senses, I found myself in utter darkness, then I called you."

"How the deuce did he get in?" asked Bishop, amazed.

"By a trap-door here," and Van Rensselaer took the candle and knelt in the center of the room. Bishop bent over him. The lines of the trap-door were plain to the eye.

"I wonder where it leads to?"

"We must open and examine. The Indian must have carried the old man away through this secret passage."

Van Rensselaer tried to open the trap-door, but the effort was in vain, he could not stir it.

Bishop then tried his hand, but with as little success.

"I shouldn't imagine that it had been used for a year," he remarked.

"Then I have been mad, or drunk, or dreamed it all," Van Rensselaer said, dryly. "But see! look at the lines of the door. Do you not see that they are free from dust, while the cracks between the boards are full?"

"That's so, by jingo!" Bishop exclaimed, after a careful examination.

"It sticks, that is all. I'll try my knife and see if I can force it up."

The effort was successful; by the help of the knife-point, Van Rensselaer raised the trap-door.

A deep, black void, into which led a pair of steps, met their eyes.

"You see this is the way by which the Indian came and by the same path he departed, taking the old man with him," Van Rensselaer said.

"Yes, but what object had he to mix himself up in the affair at all?"

"I do not understand it," Van Rensselaer replied, with frowning brows; "it is a most mysterious affair. But come; let us descend and see where this passage leads to. We may be able to find some clue to help us to unravel this tangled skein. Give me the bull's-eye."

Taking the lantern from the hand of Bishop, Van Rensselaer descended the steps and the other followed him.

At the foot of the steps they found themselves standing in a square apartment, exactly the size of the one which they had just quitted. The room was partly filled with old boxes and barrels, and evidently had been used as a sort of store-room. The two windows, like the ones in the room above, were barred with heavy shutters.

There was a door at one end of the room, evidently leading into the lower entry, but so long had it remained unused that the heavy bolts were rusted in their sockets.

"He didn't get out this way," Bishop said, in a tone of confidence, "nor yet by the windows. They haven't been used in a dog's age."

Then Van Rensselaer's eyes caught sight of a small door at the other end of the room, as he flashed the lantern around him.

"There is another door here," he said, and he proceeded to it. A cry burst from his lips as he examined it, for at the first glance he saw that the dust had been rubbed off the knob, thus proving beyond a doubt that a human hand had recently pressed it.

"Found something?" Bishop exclaimed, hastening after him.

"Yes; this door has been used, and recently."

"See where it leads to."

Van Rensselaer opened the door, and a small flight of steps stood revealed. The two ascended the stairs and found themselves at the end of the entry in which the door of room No. 1 was situated.

Puzzled, the two stopped.

"Well, if the Indian came up this way, he couldn't have got by me without my knowing it, much less carry a helpless man with him, and I never stirred from that door from the time that you went in until you called me," Bishop said, in wonder.

He had spoken the truth; there was but one mode of egress from the entry, and it was clearly impossible for any one to have got through the passageway without his knowledge.

Van Rensselaer stared around him vacantly for a moment, the clear brain and cunning wits for once were puzzled.

"I cannot understand it," he said, slowly.

"Suppose we go down-stairs to the saloon?" suggested Bishop; "we might be able to discover something to explain this affair."

Van Rensselaer simply nodded his head, but made no other reply; his wits were "wool-gathering."

The two descended to the saloon.

The music, the dancing, and the drinking were still going on. The Indian at one end of the room was still beating upon the big drum.

Van Rensselaer sauntered carelessly up to the savage, and examined him carefully. The Indian did not seem to notice the inspection of the other.

After a long and earnest gaze, Van Rensselaer led the way to the open air.

"Well?" questioned Bishop, after they had gained the sidewalk.

"That Indian is not the one who struck me in the room above," Van Rensselaer said, decidedly. "He is shorter and thicker set; the other was painted in close imitation to him, though. Are you sure that it was the real Indian that we encountered on the stairway?"

"Oh, yes, no doubt about it," Bishop answered, confidently.

"I am utterly at fault here," Van Rensselaer said, slowly.

Just then they turned the corner.

"Where's the carriage?" Bishop exclaimed.

"Gone!" Van Rensselaer said, in astonishment.

"Well, this is the queerest adventure!"

"The explanation is reasonable," Van Rensselaer observed; "the driver probably got tired waiting, and having one passenger, drove off with her."

"That's so—that is reasonable."

"We'll strike straight for Broadway and then home. I must have time to think over this night's work," Van Rensselaer said, gloomily.

The two proceeded onward.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DETECTIVE.

A SMALL, COZY room on the fourth sto., in the St. Nicholas Hotel, fronting on Broadway.

On the bed lay the old savant, Elvur Hartright. His overcoat was still on, nothing of his outward gear removed except his hat. He was buried in a profound slumber, although the morning sun was shining brightly in at the window.

The lips of the old man moved, his heavy breathing became irregular; he was shaking off the deathlike trance which the powerful drug administered in the wine of the dance-house had brought upon his senses.

Slowly—little by little—he awoke.

His dazed glance wandered around in evident amazement.

Then, with a sudden and powerful effort, he cast aside the lingering remnants of the spell, which had bound all his faculties in a leaden chain, and rose to a sitting posture on the bed.

Again he looked around him, saw that he was in his own room, on his own bed; then he surveyed himself and saw that he was fully dressed as if for the street.

"Have I been mad during the night?" he cried, in wonder, "or is all this but a terrible dream? Let me recount what has happened. First, I went to the masquerade; saw there a woman dressed in black and closely veiled; heard her voice as she passed me, and fancied that in her tones I heard again the voice of my long-lost Alice. Acting on a sudden impulse, I followed the woman, managed to gain speech with her, and after a few minutes' conversation became satisfied that fate had at last in this strange way thrown into my path the girl whom I once loved as if she had been my own child. I asked her to let me see her face, knowing that that would at once confirm my suspicion or convince me that I had made a mistake. She consented on condition that I should leave the ball-room and go with her. I agreed to this at once. We set out in a carriage. The carriage stops and we enter a desolate-looking house. I tell her the story of Alice Van Rensselaer, and explain that I think that she is the child confided to my care. She declares that she is not. Then I drink a glass of wine at her request; she removes her veil and I behold the face of Sarah Gordon, the woman whom I loved and lost long years ago; after that comes a blank. I can remember nothing more. And now I wake and find myself upon my own bed with the morning sun streaming in full upon me. I cannot understand it. It all seems like a terrible dream. I wonder what time it is?"

The old man looked at his watch. It had stopped; the hands pointed to half-past six.

"It must be later than that," he muttered, rising to his feet and proceeding to the window. The crowded state of the street convinced him that the day was no longer young.

A tap at the door attracted his attention.

"Come in," he said.

A servant entered, bearing a card, and with the message that the gentleman desired to see him at once upon important business.

"James Bright." The old gentleman thought for a moment, but he could not remember that he had ever heard the name before. "Show him up, please."

In a few moments Mr. James Bright entered the room.

"Mr. Hartright?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"My name is James Bright; I am a detective officer."

"A detective officer?" and the savant looked astonished.

"Yes, sir; you passed through some rather peculiar adventures last night, I believe." The cool and confident tone used by the detective completely astonished the old gentleman.

"Yes, sir; I confess I myself am really unable to state exactly what did happen to me last night."

"I can give you about all the particulars, I guess. You went to a masquerade ball last night, met a veiled woman there, went with her in a hack to a dance-house in Water-street—"

"A dance-house!" exclaimed Hartright, in wonder.

"Exactly; the woman, though, was as ignorant as yourself regarding the character of the place. She was but a tool in the hands of another. There you drank a glass of wine, and from that time to this all is a blank to you."

"The wine was drugged, then? I understand now the strange stupor which overcame my senses. I have traveled in India, sir, for nearly twenty years; have met the Thugs

with their silken nooses of slaughter right in their native jungles; but they are harmless compared with the Thugs of this great city; at least my adventures last night would seem to say so," Hartright said, seriously.

"And you were robbed last night."

"Robbed!"

The old gentleman felt of his watch, then placed his hand upon his pocket-book.

"My watch and pocketbook are safe—"

"But you have some valuable papers, I believe."

The savant looked at the detective in utter amazement.

"How could you know that?" he asked.

"My dear Mr. Hartright, it is our business to know a little of almost every thing," the detective replied, smiling. "But are the papers safe?"

Hartright felt for the will in his breast-pocket, then for the papers sewed up in the lining of his vest.

"They are gone!" he cried; "my vest has been ripped open and the valuable papers relating to the birth of my lost Alice are stolen. Another paper has been taken from the breast-pocket of my overcoat."

"Three papers gone?"

"Yes."

"The marriage-certificate of Philip Van Rensselaer and Sarah Gordon, the record of baptism of the child of that union, Alice, and the will of Philip Van Rensselaer, wherein he bequeaths fifty thousand dollars to David and Clara, and fifty thousand dollars to Alice Gordon Van Rensselaer," the detective said.

"How is it possible that you should know the contents of these papers?" asked the savant, in wonder. "Particularly the division of the property made by the will. Even I am a stranger to that, for it is still sealed up, just as I received it from Philip Van Rensselaer."

"Our secrets are our stock in trade, Mr. Hartright," the detective said. "No matter how I gained my information, rest assured that it is correct."

"But who could have stolen these papers?" asked Hartright, bewildered.

"What person in this world has an interest in having all proof of the birth of Alice Van Rensselaer destroyed?" Bright asked.

"I can not guess."

"I can; I'm on the trail and I'll run the fox to earth before I get through," the detective said, with an air of cool determination. "Mr. Hartright, I am acting entirely in the interest of the missing heir, Alice Van Rensselaer, in this matter. Will you be guided by my advice? You have already been the victim of a trick to rob you of these papers. When the guilty party feels the meshes of Justice closing around him, he may become desperate and strike at your life, for you are the one witness living who can prove the identity of the girl, Alice."

"But have you trace of her?" the old man asked eagerly.

"No, not yet, but keen hounds are on the scent."

"Do you know who the veiled woman was who decoyed me to the dance-house last night?"

"No, I do not."

"Find her out! She is Alice Van Rensselaer, I am sure of it, although she said that she was not."

"I'll discover the truth before I'm a day older," the detective said, confidently. "And now, Mr. Hartright, I want you to run away."

"Run away!"

"Yes; go and hide yourself somewhere—in some small place near the city where I can get at you easily when I want you. You mustn't give the gentleman I am fighting against a chance to steal your life as easily as he did the precious papers that you lost last night."

"I place myself entirely in your hands," the savant said.
"Good; that is all I ask. In two hours I'll hide you away snugly. We have a powerful and an able foe to deal with; we can't afford to throw away a chance."

A few more words and the interview ended.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE SCENT.

ABOUT four hours after the interview between the detective and the old savant, a hackman, sitting on the box of his coach in Union Square, was accosted by a keen-eyed stranger.

"Did you drive a party from the Academy of Music to a house down in Water street?" the stranger asked, who was no other than the California detective, Bright.

"Well"—and the coachman shut one eye and surveyed the stranger carefully—"I don't exactly remember whether I did or not."

"Would a five-dollar bill help your memory any?" asked the detective, quietly, drawing a "greenback" from his pocket and displaying it in his open palm.

The coachman grinned.

"Now you're talkin', Cap.," he said, emphatically. "Wot do you want to know?"

"You drove the party to the place in Water street; then they all got out and entered the house. After a little while the woman came out, said something to you, got into the carriage, and you drove off."

"Cor-rect; you've got it down fine, now," said the driver, in admiration.

"Now, I want to know what the woman said to you and where you drove her to."

"What's the lay, anyway?"

"Five dollars for you if you give me the information; that's your 'lay'; what mine is, is my own business and nobody else's."

"Well, you're jes' as sharp as a meat ax; don't play many points on you, you kin jes' bet! I'm your man fur to rake in that V," the driver said. "The woman told me that I needn't wait fur the rest of the party, but that I could drive her to the corner of Twenty-third street and Broadway, which I did, an' she got out an' 'lit' out down Twenty-third street toward Fifth avenue. Got the worth of your five dollars, boss?"

"Hardly, but a bargain's a bargain; here's the money," and the detective handed the bill to the driver and sauntered off carelessly up the street.

"He's a cool hand, whoever he is," the hackman said, as he pocketed the bill.

"Not much information gained there," the detective said to himself, as he walked slowly onward. "The woman evidently designed to throw any one off her track. I am at fault. Luck must aid me here, for calculation can't, that's certain."

"Say, mister," piped a childish voice, in a shrill treble, close by the detective's side.

Bright looked around and saw a little, ragged, red-headed urchin. The folded papers under his arm told what his vocation was.

"Well, what is it, sonny?" asked Bright.

"I heerd wot you said to that feller wot drives the hack," and the boy grinned intelligently.

"Oh, you did?"

"You bet; I kin show you where the girl went to, if you'll come down with the stamps," the boy said, and he winked one eye in a very significant manner.

"Luck turns up a trump-card, by Jove!" the detective cried to himself, in glee. "All right, my little man; I guess you and I can make a trade."

"You bet we kin!" cried the youth, confidently.

"How did you happen to know any thing about this affair?" Bright asked.

"Well, I hangs out round John Allen's, in Water street, I does; them's my stumpin'-grounds at night. I was a-snoozin down in a coal-box when the carriage driv' up, an' coaches ain't common down in Water street, boss; so I jist watched how the old thing worked. I see'd 'em go into the crib, then I see'd the gal come out and heerd her speak to the cove wot driv' the hack. An' when I heerd her speak I knew who she was."

"You did?" cried the detective, in glee; he was paying very strict attention to the newsboy's story.

"Yes; I see'd her act at the the-a-ter. I used fur to go inter the gallery; it was jes' bully, now, I tell yer."

"She is an actress, then?"

"That's so—I see'd her; don't fool this child much now, you bet!" cried the boy, with a sagacious wink.

"You kept your eyes upon her, then?"

"Well, I jes' did, now. I thought somethin' was up, so when the masheen driv' off, I jumped up ahind. The gal went down Twenty-third street, an' I foller'd her till she went home."

"You know where she lives?"

"Oh, no, of course not; it's the man around the corner."

"That's just what I want to know." Bright understood the boy.

"I say, sport, it takes stamps to buy whisky," the boy said, with an air of wisdom.

"How much?"

"How's a dollar for high?" inquired the youth.

"I 'chip' in."

"I 'call' you, sport," and the boy extended his hand; it was evident from his speech that he was no stranger to the beauties of the mystic game known as poker.

The detective placed a dollar in the hand of the boy, and he quickly conveyed it to his pocket.

"Do you want fur to know her name?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Miss Coralie York."

"And where does she live?"

"I kin show you, but I can't tell you."

"Go ahead, then."

"It's up town," and the boy led the way up the street.

"Say, wasn't it lucky, boss, that I see'd you last night down in the saloon?"

"Did you see me there?" the detective asked, in wonder.

"Course I did; that's the reason why I hung round when you was a-talkin' to the hackman. I thought maybe that you might want fur to know somethin' 'bout it."

Up the street till they reached Twenty-second; then they turned into that street, and went on till the boy at last halted before a modest two-story brick house.

"This is the crib," he said, confidently.

"You are sure that you haven't made any mistake?"

"Nary mistake," replied the boy, promptly. "Say, sport, if you want any job like this done, jes' you come to me. Billy Bat's my name; any of the rounders down in Water street knows me. I'm the boy with the auburn hair, I am!" And then the boy danced off down the street.

"Shall I make a bold dash for it?" mused the detective. "I am almost certain that she took the will from the old man when she bent over him before she called Van Rensselaer into the room. The blow may as well be struck now as at any other time. The sudden stroke may take her by surprise. I'll go it, just for luck."

And with this determination, the detective ascended the steps and rung the door-bell. In a few seconds a servant opened the door.

"Is Miss Coralie York in?" the detective asked, blandly.

"Yes, sir," the girl replied.

"Will you be kind enough to tell her that a gentleman desires to see her on important business?"

"Shall I take up your name, sir?"

"No; that is useless; I am an entire stranger to Miss York; she would not know my name. Only be particular to tell her that my business is very important."

"Yes, sir."

The servant conducted the detective into the modest little parlor, and then withdrew to bear the message to the lady.

"Now I wonder what sort of a party this is," Bright muttered, as he sat down in a comfortable easy-chair, and waited for the young lady to make her appearance.

He did not have long to wait, for in a few minutes Coralie entered the room.

The moment the detective's eyes fell upon her face, he started as though he had received an electric shock; while Coralie upon her part looked amazed when she beheld the face of the detective officer.

It was evident that both were strangely excited.

Controlling his wonder with a powerful effort, the detective rose to his feet and bowed to the girl.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Miss Coralie York?" he asked.

The girl gazed with a look of blank amazement into the face of the detective, when his voice fell upon her ear.

"Yes, that is my name," she said, slowly, recovering from her astonishment.

"I beg pardon!" exclaimed the detective, suddenly; "but have I not had the pleasure of seeing you before?"

"I think so," she replied, "for your voice is strangely familiar and your face also, but I can not remember where."

"Neither can I," he said, puzzled, "and it is very strange, for I seldom forget a face. But allow me to offer you a chair, as our interview may take up some time."

The two sat down facing each other.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RECOGNITION.

"In the first place, to begin right at the beginning," said Bright, "I am a detective officer."

Coralie started in surprise.

"A detective officer!" she exclaimed, in astonishment, not unmixed with alarm.

"Yes, Miss, a detective officer," repeated the gentleman, coolly, never taking his keen eyes off the pretty face of the actress for a moment.

A rapid and a searching glance Coralie cast at the impulsive face of the detective, as though he expected therein to read his thoughts, but the face of the Californian was as a sealed volume.

"A detective officer, and you have business with me?" she asked, slowly, and in a tone of wonder.

"Yes; you must not be astonished at that; we detectives, you know, have business with almost everybody. I suppose of course that you are curious to know what my business is with you?"

"Yes, I frankly confess I am curious."

"I will not keep you long in suspense, but proceed at once to explain. Last night an old gentleman named Hartright was decoyed from the masquerade ball at the Academy of Music to a low den in Water street. A woman acted as the decoy. There, in the Water street dance-house, the old

gentleman was induced to drink a glass of drugged wine. He fell asleep, and during his sleep was robbed of a valuable paper."

Coralie's face grew deathly white as she listened to the words of the detective, but beyond that she betrayed no sign of emotion.

"What has this to do with me?" she asked, with a great effort controlling herself and speaking with an unnatural calmness.

"Only that you are the veiled woman who, in this matter, acted as the tool of David Van Rensselaer."

Coralie wondered at the knowledge possessed by the detective, but made no reply.

"You do not answer," Bright said, after quite a long pause. "You can not deny that I have spoken the truth. I do not blame you for the part that you have played in this affair, for I fully understand that it was forced upon you, and that, until the last moment, when retreat was impossible, you did not really know what you were doing."

"Suppose that I do not deny the truth; why should you think that I am in possession of the paper stolen from the old gentleman?" she asked, slowly.

"The guess is natural enough; the paper was in the old man's possession when he entered the room. After you departed, the paper was gone," Bright answered.

"And your business with me?" Coralie questioned.

"Is to ask you to give up the paper."

"To you?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I have the paper, why should I give it to you? What assurance have I that you are not an enemy to the old gentleman rather than a friend?"

"And your purpose, then, in taking the paper was to prevent it from falling into the hands of David Van Rensselaer?" Bright said, quickly.

"I have not confessed that I have the paper yet," Coralie replied, a smile appearing on her face for the first time.

The detective laughed.

"I have very little doubt regarding that. Have you any idea of what that paper is, or of its value?"

Coralie shook her head.

"David Van Rensselaer would be willing to give from ten to twenty thousand dollars for that document."

The young girl looked astonished.

"It is the will of his father, Philip. It gives one-half of the property to David and Clara, and the other half to Alice Gordon Van Rensselaer, his eldest child."

Then Coralie suddenly remembered that Alice Van Rensselaer was the child of whom the stranger had spoken!

"You see that David Van Rensselaer was playing for a heavy stake when he entrapped you into aiding his purpose."

"Yes," Coralie said, absently; her thoughts were busy with the history of the lost heir as related by the stranger during the interview in the dance-house.

"Do you know that I think I can persuade you to give me that paper?" the detective said, suddenly.

During the whole interview he had been critically examining the girl's face. The cool, clear-headed detective officer was strangely interested in the young and pretty actress.

Coralie looked at her visitor in astonishment.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I have an idea that you and I are old friends."

"Your voice and face are so familiar, and yet—" Coralie paused in doubt.

"Oh, I've changed greatly in three years," he said, carelessly.

"Three years!" The girl started, and a crimson flush came into her pale cheeks.

"Yes, three years ago the bronze of the sun was not upon my cheeks; the piney wind of the sierras had not roughened my brow. Wielding the pick in the mountain gulches and clinging to the back of a half-tamed mustang on the prairie, have toughened the weak sinews and given a more manly vigor to the form of the once drunken lawyer."

Almost breathless, Coralie sprung from her chair.

"Oh! my heart did not deceive me!" she cried, in joy. "The moment I saw your face it whispered the truth to me. Oh, how blind I have been not to have recognized you at once, Royal!"

And with a glance full of love she extended her hands to him.

"My own dear girl!" he cried, rising to his feet.

Another moment she was in his arms, folded to his heart.

She wound her arms around him as the clinging vine winds around the oak. Her heart was too full for words.

"I guessed that it was you the moment you entered the room," he said; "but you have changed greatly in three years. Who could have expected to find Sue, the Orange Girl, in the famous actress, Coralie York?"

"I knew that you were not dead," she murmured; "I knew that some day you would return to me."

"And so I have, and now, Sue, my own dear girl, will you give me that paper?"

"Yes," she said.

"I knew that I could persuade you," he said, laughing.

She hid her blushing face on his breast.

"By the way, Sue, how about the promise that you gave me three years ago? Does it still hold good?"

"Do you wish it so?" she asked, lowly.

"Do you doubt it?" he cried, quickly.

"No."

"Ah, Sue, I've dreamed of this moment many a time during the past three years. Every time that I added an ounce of gold to my store, I said, 'that brings me so much nearer to the girl I love.' First to complete my task of vengeance, and then to find happiness in your love."

"A task of vengeance?" she said.

"Yes; I've yet to punish Van Rensselaer for that dark night's work in Mulberry street, when poor O'Kale fell by his assassin hand. It was David Van Rensselaer who set fire to the old house to destroy all evidence of his crime. And now he wishes to get possession of this will so that he may rob his half-sister, Alice, of her share of his father's estate. A cool, calculating villain is this same Van Rensselaer."

"But this girl, Alice—is she living?" Coralie asked.

"I hope so; I have a brother detective employed to hunt her up now. Do you know what this old gentleman Hartlight declares?"

"No; what?"

"That you are Alice Van Rensselaer."

Coralie shook her head sadly.

"I know that; that is the reason why he went with me so readily from the masquerade. In the tones of my voice even he detected a resemblance to the child confided to his care."

"But you yourself—what do you think of the idea?"

"I wish that it were possible, but I am afraid that it is not," the girl said, mournfully.

"He is strong in his belief. I had an interview with him this morning and almost his last words to me were, that when I found you I would discover the heiress to half of the Van Rensselaer estate. Do you know who your parents were, Sue?"

"No."

"Perhaps, then, the old man may be right in his assertion?" Bright said, hopefully.

"I am afraid not. Last night he told me the story of Alice Van Rensselaer, and though in some particulars it reminded me of my own life, yet the name of the woman to whose care he confided the child was not familiar to me."

"Sit down, Sue, and tell me all that you can remember of your childhood; perhaps it may aid me."

CHAPTER XXI

DIGGING THE MINE.

CORALIE drew her chair close to that of her lover, and leaning her head on his shoulder, while his arm encircled her waist, began her story.

"The first I can remember is living in a large wooden house surrounded by trees. I feel sure that this house was in the country. A middle-aged woman whom I used to call aunty took care of me. Her name was Wilson. Her husband was a great, strong, brutal man who used to steep his brain in liquor and then come home and ill-treat her. I think I was about five years old at that time."

"But, can you not remember any of your life before this period that you speak of?" the detective asked.

"Nothing distinctly," the girl replied, slowly; "a sort of dreamy remembrance comes back to me, sometimes, wherein I see other faces, and hear other voices, but it is so shadowy that I can hardly believe it is any thing but fancy. One dark night aunty took me by the hand after having dressed me for walking, and we left the house. I did not understand it then, but I do now; she was flying from her husband. We came to New York. She had a hard struggle for existence, and finally, acting under the advice of the woman with whom she had found shelter, she sent me out into the street with a basket of fruit to sell. The woman's daughter also sold fruit in the street and she instructed me."

"But is your name Susan?"

"I don't know; Mrs. Wilson always called me Dolly, but my street friend said that was no name at all and that I must be called Susan. When I asked aunty if Dolly was truly my name she became angry and scolded me, and so at last when any one asked what my name was, I answered Susan."

"Your story affords me no clue," Bright said, slowly. "But don't despair. I've got one of the best men in the detective force on the scent and he'll discover the truth if any one can."

"But, Royal," said the girl, suddenly, "why did you not give your name to the servant, or did you wish to surprise me?"

"You forget, my darling, I hadn't the remotest idea that it was you whom I was going to see," he replied. "How could I guess that Coralie York, the actress, was Sue Wilson, the Orange Girl? Besides, all New York knows me now as James Bright, the California detective. Royal Keene has changed, too, you see, in three years."

"But to me you are just the same."

"Just as dear?" he quizzed, roguishly, passing his hand tightly over the smooth forehead of the girl.

"Yes," she whispered, lowly and coyly.

"And now I must say good-by," he said, rising; "I've work on hand that must not be delayed."

"When will you come again?" she asked, quickly.

"Will you be at home to-morrow evening?"

"Yes."

"I will come then; good-by."

Again he pressed the lithe form of the young girl to his heart, kissed the ripe, red lips so full of dewy freshness, and then took his departure.

"If she would only turn out to be the heir now," he mumbled, as he walked up the street. "What a terrible vengeance that would be, for me to marry the woman whose presence in the world robs Van Rensselaer of half his fortune! Half his fortune!" he repeated, slowly. "Why not the whole? Why not with one blow crush him to the earth, a beggar?"

The face of the detective grew dark and troubled as he brooded over the question.

"By heaven! I'll do it!" he exclaimed, decidedly, after a long pause, during which he had revolved the subject over in his mind. "I'll hit upon some scheme. First his reputation; then his fortune; and then—shall the gallows play a prominent part in the last act of the drama? We shall see."

As the detective turned into the avenue, he nearly ran over Oward, the reporter, who was hurrying down the street.

"Hallo!" cried Joe; "you're the very man I want to see."

"Well, what is it?"

"When does that little affair come off?"

"What affair do you mean?"

"What you told me about when we were driving down town from the masquerade last night—the descent on the club-room."

"Ah, yes, I remember now," Bright said. "I rather think I shall explode the mine to-night."

"You promised to let me know, you know. It will make a splendid sensation article."

"Yes, particularly when you explain that a descendant of one of the oldest and best families in New York is the proprietor of the den," Bright said, with a quiet smile.

"Oh, it will make a sensation, sure!" the reporter exclaimed, rubbing his hands together, gleefully.

"Well, meet me at the Fifth Avenue Hotel to-night about nine. I shall know by that time whether it will come off to-night or not."

"Depend upon me; I'll be on hand."

Then the two parted.

Bright proceeded directly to the Central Police Station, and had a long interview with the Superintendent of Police, and when he parted with that gentleman, there was a smile of triumph playing around his lips.

"The first blow to-night," he muttered; "the second will soon follow. I don't intend to give him breathing time between the strokes. Cranshaw may be back to-morrow. If he succeeds in finding out any thing about the heir—any thing that will give me a clue as to where she is—I ask for nothing more."

As Bright turned into Broadway he came face to face with Abrams, the diamond broker.

"Hold on!" he cried, catching that worthy gentleman by the arm.

"What you wants mit me?" exclaimed the Jew, in astonishment, gazing into the face of the other.

"You don't know me, eh?"

"So s'help me, I never saw you before!"

"Oh, yes, you have; take a good look at me."

The Jew adjusted his eye-glasses on his nose and surveyed Bright keenly. Gradually a look of recognition came over his face.

"Oh, Moses! if 'tisn't Mister Keene!" And the Jew grasped him cordially by the hand.

"Hush! don't mention the name quite so loud, please," Bright said, drawing the broker to one side.

"Vash is de matter, my tear?" asked the Jew, inquiringly.

"You forget that little bit of paper that I deposited with you about three years ago, and which you disposed of to David Van Rensselaer. Oh, Abrams! to go back on a friend in that way!" and the detective shook his head mournfully.

"It vash not mine fault; you no come as you sail and take up de note," the Jew exclaimed, with outstretched hands.

"When a man pours in liquor he generally drives out sense," Bright said, tersely. "Why, you gave me, bound hand and foot, right into the clutches of my worst enemy."

"So s'help me Isaac! I thought he vash a friend of yours all de vile!" Abrams protested.

"You got me into a pretty hobble. I had to get out of the country."

"You leaf your guntree for your guntree's goot, eh?" and the Jew chuckled at the joke.

"Exactly; and now, old boy, I've got another little bit of business with you."

"Dat ish all right. I hafe do much busness with you. I hafe bought almost every t'ing you hafe in de world, from your diamonds down to your boots," and the jolly broker laughed, boisterously. "You ish a goot feller; I likes you very much. You hafe somet'ing to sell—I gifes you goot price for it."

"It is a certain paper—"

"No more notes, mine goot friend—"

"Don't be in a hurry," interrupted the detective; "it isn't a note, but a will—"

"A will?" exclaimed the Jew, in amazement.

"What you s'pose I do mit a will, eh?"

"Sell it!"

"Who would buy such a t'ing?"

"Only one man in the world, and that man, David Van Rensselaer."

"I no understand."

"Why, it is the will of his father, Philip. This will has just come to light. It rather interferes with David, and he would give a good round price to get his fingers upon the will and destroy it."

"You t'ink so, eh?" the Jew said, thoughtfully.

"Why, man, I know so. Come, you owe me a little for letting Van Rensselaer get hold of that note. Now, then, I want you to take this will to Van Rensselaer and offer to sell it to him; or, rather go to him and tell him that you know where the will is, and that for a certain price you will place it in his hands."

"Ah, I see, my tear; you vant monish, eh?"

"It's a very natural want; almost everybody in this world is troubled that way."

"Dat ish true; you come mit me to mine office, and I talks mit you."

Arm in arm the two proceeded up the street.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

On Twenty-third street, only a few hundred yards from Broadway, was a handsome brown-stone mansion.

Unlike all the other houses in the street, which had lights flashing from the windows, this one was perfectly dark. The blinds were drawn down closely, and nothing without gave sign of life within.

The night was a dark and cloudy one; but few people were passing in the street, for the hour of ten had struck, and even Broadway began to be less crowded with human forms.

It was strange, this house dark and solitary beside the brilliantly lighted ones at its side!

The mansion was not deserted, though, for there was just a little glimmer of light through the stained glass panel over the door.

Yet, despite the gloom which hung around the house, it had a steady stream of visitors, some on foot and some in carriages.

They ascended the steps, rung the bell, and the door opened almost instantly, showing plainly that the guardian of the portal was near at hand and on the alert.

Had any one of a curious turn of mind stood in the street and watched the entry of the visitors, he would have noticed that there were no ladies among them, and that they were all well dressed—plainly men of standing.

Some of the visitors walked directly by the colored gentleman who attended to the door, merely nodding their heads as they passed; these were evidently no strangers to the house. Others paused on the threshold and exchanged a few words with the ebony guardian, and then passed on; these seemed to be strangers to the house and doorkeeper.

But when the guests had passed the outer door, an inner one, tightly closed, barred their passage; and, behind the door, another colored gentleman, through a small wicket, kept a wary eye upon the applicants for admission.

Passing the second Cerberus, the visitors ascended a broad and winding stair-case, covered by a velvet carpet, into which the foot sunk, so rich was the texture. At the head of the stairway a richly-stained glass door gave entrance to a parlor, so magnificently fitted up that it seemed like the palace of some Eastern king.

It was, indeed, the reception room of a monarch, King Faro! A sovereign, whose crown jewels are formed of the pearly tears of gamblers' beggared wives and children, and the red life-drops from the ruined suicide's heart.

The elegant mansion we have described was what is commonly termed a "club-room;" in plainer English, a "gambling-den."

The latter name is apt. Few men stake their money upon the turning of a card but find it so in the end.

The paws of "the tiger" are velvet ones, but the claws they hide give terrible wounds.

The room was well filled with players. Quite a little knot of people were gathered around the faro table.

Every once in a while one of the players, his face pale and haggard, would leave the little circle, walk, almost mechanically, to the side-board, covered with a glittering array of decanters, fill himself a glass of brandy and toss it off at a draught, then return again to the green-covered board, whereon, perhaps, he was staking not only his money, but his reputation, upon the uncertain chance of the card handled by the dexterous fingers of the professional gambler.

Seated in a chair near the faro table, watching the game but not playing, was David Van Rensselaer.

To judge from his listless manner, one would think that he had strolled into the gaming saloon more for the purpose of passing away an idle hour than of risking his money at the game of chance.

Just then two more visitors entered.

One of the two was Bishop. The other was an elaborately got up individual, with light, curly hair and flowing side-whiskers, who looked like an Englishman.

When Bishop saw Van Rensselaer he excused himself to his friend and came at once to the New Yorker.

"Who have you got there?" Van Rensselaer asked.

"He's a young Englishman whom I was introduced to to-night at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. His name is Thornly. He's just from the other side of the water, plenty of money and very little brains. He wanted a little amusement, so I volunteered to show him around."

"Is he going to play?"

"I guess I can induce him to, if the 'bank' is willing to do the fair thing by me," said Bishop, with a covert glance in the face of the other.

"Well, I don't know much about it," Van Rensselaer observed, carelessly. "Doctor Hallen, yonder, has some interest in the establishment, I believe." Van Rensselaer indicated a slender, sallow-faced man, with small gray eyes, who was leaning carelessly on a chair near the sideboard.

"I'll speak to him; but, first, I'll introduce the Englishman to you."

Bishop joined the stranger and brought him over to where Van Rensselaer was.

"Allow me, Thornly, to introduce you to Mr. Van Rensselaer, one of our old New York stock."

The gentlemen bowed and shook hands.

"Excuse me for a moment; I wish to speak to a friend over there," and Bishop left the two together and accosted the man leaning on the back of the chair.

"Are you going to play, sir?" Van Rensselaer asked.

"Yas, I think so, you know," the Englishman replied, sucking the head of his cane and staring vacantly around him.

Van Rensselaer looked at the stranger, in wonder. The tones of his voice seemed strangely familiar to him. The Englishman did not seem to notice the look.

"Your voice seems very familiar to me," Van Rensselaer said.

"Yas, deuced odd, isn't it? never saw you before, you know," the Englishman replied, still sucking the head of the little cane.

Bishop and Hallen had walked over to one of the windows and were engaged in a busy conversation.

"I won't do it," replied Hallen, decidedly, in answer to something that Bishop had said to him.

"Oh, yes, you will!" replied Bishop, coolly; "there ain't a bit of use of trying to kick up a fuss. Better acknowledge the corn at once."

"How in blazes did you put up this job?" asked Hallen, in sullen anger.

"Don't you worry about that," said Bishop, coolly and soothingly; "the thing is fixed, and you can no more stop it than you can roll the East river backward. It's a good offer; better take it. He's played out now, I tell you; 'shake him.'

For a few moments the gambler was silent, evidently weighing the matter over in his mind. Suddenly he spoke.

"I'll do it!" he cried, with an oath; "he'd throw me overboard in a minute if he took it into his head to do so."

"You never said a truer thing in your life, Doc. It's a bargain, then?"

"Yes."

The two separated.

But, as Bishop was crossing the room to where Van Rensselaer and the Englishman were, a tall, slender young fellow, with a white hat and a reckless, jaunty air, sauntered into the room.

"Well, Bob?" questioned Bishop, anxiously accosting the new-comer.

"It's all right," said the other, with a wink; "my 'get-up' took both the darkeys for all they were worth. Lord! you ought to have seen the old inside cuss stare when I snapped the bracelets on him. He started to raise a howl, but I put the revolver under his nose and he weakened."

"The men are in the house, then?"

"All co-rect, but we can't get at the back way; the doors down-stairs are locked."

"Haven't either of the darkeys got the keys?"

"No, we searched them."

"We'll have to look out for them up here then. Come with me, and we'll quietly make our way to the door."

So the two sauntered into the back room, and stationed themselves at one of the doors there. So carelessly had they gained their position, that no one suspected they had any other motive than an idle curiosity to overlook the game.

The Englishman had been staring around the room like an owl brought suddenly into the light. Suddenly he took his cane down from his mouth, drew a whistle from his pocket, placed it to his lips and blew a shrill blast upon it.

So quick had been the action that even Van Rensselaer, standing by his side, had not noticed it until the shrill sound pierced his ears.

The room was in confusion in an instant. All realized that danger was near at hand.

A second more and the blue-coated Metropolitans poured in through the doorway.

The gamblers made a frantic rush toward the rear door, but Bishop and the white-hatted youth, with drawn revolvers, kept them back.

"Surrender, gentlemen; resistance is useless!" cried the sergeant of the attacking party.

"Who is the proprietor?"

"That man, David Van Rensselaer!" exclaimed Hallen, pointing to the young man.

There was a tableau of astonishment, for few within the room suspected that Van Rensselaer had anything to do with the management of the "club-room."

"You villain!" cried Van Rensselaer, in wrath.

"Fall in, gentlemen," said the officer.

The Englishman had disappeared during the confusion.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TWO FAILURES.

GUARDED by a strong detachment of police, the prisoners were marched off to the station-house.

Van Rensselaer and Doc Hallen accidentally came side by side as the little procession moved onward.

"Why did you betray me?" Van Rensselaer asked. "The arrest to you would amount to nothing, but the exposure will ruin me forever. If you had not spoken, they would have believed that I was merely a visitor like the rest."

"They've rung in a 'cold deck' on you, sport," the gambler replied, flippantly. "This job has been put up. If I hadn't spoken, they would have got it out of somebody else. I'm not over flush, and I don't care to put out a thousand or so to get out of the scrape."

"I would have stood all that; I would willingly give five times one thousand to have avoided this infamy," Van Rensselaer said, bitterly.

"What does it amount to, anyway?" Hallen exclaimed, carelessly. "New York will forget all about it in a week. 'Tisn't much of a disgrace to run a faro-shop nowadays. A member of Congress has done it, and don't our friend, John, mix with all the big-bugs at Long Branch and at Saratoga? You forget, too, that one of our most prominent politicians made his money in the 'policy' business—a regular two-cent affair."

"The name I bear has never figured in a police court before," Van Rensselaer muttered, sullenly.

"Well, why don't you square the captain in charge of the squad? If you make it an object, he'll probably be able to fix it so you can slip off."

"I'll try it!" Van Rensselaer said, eagerly, and his face brightened up at the prospect of escape.

He easily obtained permission to speak to the officer, and found to his gratification that he was well acquainted with him.

"This is an ugly affair," he said to the officer.

"Yes; I'm sorry for you, Mr. Van Rensselaer."

"Isn't there any way of arranging this matter?" Van Rensselaer said, quietly.

"What do you mean?" asked the officer, casting a glance backward to see if any of his men were within earshot.

"Why, I have a great objection to figuring in a police court, especially when connected with such an affair as this. Of course you understand that it won't amount to any thing, except to make a little talk about me."

"Yes, of course I know that," the officer said. He had figured in too many police raids before not to know that the prisoners only went through a farce of an examination and were either discharged or bailed, and that no punishment was ever meted out to the *high-toned* gamblers, whatever might be done to the smaller fry who ran "keno" games, and robbed their victims by cents instead of dollars.

"Captain, is a hundred dollars any object to you?"

"Well—yes," the policeman said, slowly.

"And if you were to arrive at the station a hundred dollars in pocket and one prisoner short, it wouldn't make any difference, would it, in a case like this, where you know perfectly well that the prisoner will be discharged after a few minutes' examination?"

The officer was silent for a moment. Van Rensselaer watched him closely; he guessed he was thinking the matter over.

"Mr. Van Rensselaer," said the officer, suddenly, "I don't pretend to be any more honest than the law allows. In a case like this, I don't think that I would be neglecting my duty much if I were to take your hundred dollars and let you slide, but I don't want to rob you of your money."

"Rob me?" Van Rensselaer said, in surprise.

"Exactly; as I understand, you don't want your name to get into the papers mixed up in this affair?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's too late. If you were to slip off, it wouldn't prevent the whole particulars from being published, and it would probably result in getting me broke."

"But I do not understand!" Van Rensselaer exclaimed, in amazement.

"Why, the whole thing is a put-up job to publish you as being proprietor of the place."

There's a newspaper feller along. The house was 'pulled' just on purpose to get you."

"But the motive?" Van Rensselaer questioned, breathlessly.

"You've got an enemy, and he's fixed this affair. He's a pretty powerful one, too, I should judge. He's got all the 'press gang' at his back, and the superintendent, too. So you see it's no use to kick; I can't help you any."

Van Rensselaer fell back to his former position, rage burning in his heart. He guessed only too well who had struck the blow. He remembered the threat of Royal Keene, "First your reputation!"

The threat had been kept.

The party reached the police-station. A judge was already on the bench ready for the case.

The farcical examination was proceeded with, and in twenty minutes the case was concluded.

Van Rensselaer was placed under bail, for which they readily accepted his personal recognition, and the case was dismissed.

There was but one reporter in the court-room, Joe Oward, and Van Rensselaer accosted him.

Joe had just closed his note-book, and a smile illuminated his face as he thought what a splendid article he could write up about the affair.

"You are a reporter?" Van Rensselaer said, shortly.

"I am, sir," Joe answered, blandly.

"You are the only one here, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want to keep this affair out of the newspapers; can it be arranged?"

"Yes, I guess so," said Joe, carelessly.

Van Rensselaer's face lighted up.

"Ah, how much? I am willing to pay handsomely," he said.

"Fifty thousand dollars," said the reporter, twirling his pencil in his fingers.

"What!" cried Van Rensselaer, enraged; "you are either drunk or mad."

"Neither, sir," replied Oward, calmly, "but I fancy that you are, when you imagine for a single instant that you can fetter the Press of New York city or prevent a newspaper reporter from saying just what he likes in his article. You can do that sort of thing in Penn Yan but not in New York. Good-evening, sir." And the reporter hurried away, leaving Van Rensselaer mad with rage.

He left the court-room and hastened up-town. The cool air of the night was welcome to his feverish brow.

"To-morrow it will be all over New York," he muttered, "but I'll be even with that scoundrel for this night's work!"

Then suddenly to his mind came the thought of the Englishman who had called himself Thornly.

"No wonder that his voice sounded familiar to me," he muttered bitterly. "It was Keene disguised. Oh, fool that I was not to have recognized him at once!"

Van Rensselaer's thoughts were far from being pleasant as he walked rapidly onward.

As he opened the door of his mansion, Clara came out of the parlor to greet him.

"You are up late, Clara," he said, with an effort striving to conceal his annoyance.

"Yes; Mr. Lawrence has just gone away."

"He made a long call."

"Yes; what do you suppose has happened, David?" Clara asked, gleefully.

"I'm sure I can't guess," he replied, absently; his thoughts were on other things.

"Lawrence has proposed."

"He has, eh?" The brother did not appear to be overjoyed at the news.

"Yes," and then Clara watched her brother's face for a moment. "Why, you don't seem to be a bit glad."

"Oh, yes, I am," he replied, quickly. "I am not very well to-night; that is the reason probably why I look so."

"Yes, he offered himself to-night and I accepted him. He's been paying attention now for nearly three years, and I thought it was about time that I made up my mind."

"I agree with you there," Van Rensselaer said, dryly. "You have at last discovered that you love him?"

"Well, I don't know that," the girl said, slowly. "I don't really think I like him any better than I used to. But I suppose I ought to get married sometime, and he's got plenty of money, and I don't like anybody else better than I do him—"

"And so you concluded to accept him?" David's lip curled with a slight sneer as he put the question. Clara did not notice the look that was upon her brother's face.

"Yes; I want to go to Europe, too, and I can't afford it out of my own money."

"It's very convenient to have a rich husband to pay the bills, Clara," David said, gravely.

"That's what I thought," she said, carelessly.

"Well, good-night, I'll go to bed now. Dolly is coming to see me again to-morrow evening."

Clara went up-stairs while David went into the library, and turning up the light, sat down to think.

"The first blow has been successful," he muttered; "the second will be aimed at the fortune. Curse the luck!" he cried, listlessly.

"Just as Clara has succeeded in hooking this wealthy fool the terrible scandal must come out! I'll take care that Mr. Lawrence does not back out though. He has committed himself and now he must go on."

Van Rensselaer remained for awhile in a deep study.

"Can the heir be living?" he cried, at length. "If she is, and this Keene can find her, the moment he does so, the second blow will come. I must prepare to meet it."

Van Rensselaer had uneasy slumbers that night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DETECTIVE'S REPORT.

At seven o'clock on the following morning, Royal Keene—we shall give the California detective, Bright, his proper name in the future—was in waiting at the Hudson River Railroad Depot.

Prompt on time, the first express from the West came in, and from the train came the detective, Cranshaw.

"Get my dispatch?" he said to Keene, as he grasped him by the hand.

"Yes; you've made quick work of it."

"And just by an accident," Cranshaw said; "I'll explain as we walk along."

The two left the depot and proceeded down the avenue.

"When I got to Sandy Creek and proceeded to hunt up the people whose names you gave me, I couldn't find a single one of them. They had either died or moved away. I hunted all over the village, of course pushing my inquiries very cautiously. But, at last, I had to give up, clean beat. So I returned to the little hotel where I had taken up my quarters. In the bar-room, which was the office as well, I got into conversation with a queer old codger, who looked as if he was about a hundred years old. He had lived in Sandy Creek all his life, and knew all about every man, woman or child who had lived in the town for the last sixty years. Of course when I discovered this, I saw at once that he was the man for my money. So I carefully turned my conversation to the Gordon family. He gave me the whole history of the marriage of Philip Van Rensselaer to Sarah Gordon, and come to find out, he was one of the Gordon family himself, a cousin to Sarah Gordon. In about ten minutes I discovered that he was the only person in the world who could put me on the right scent. In order that you should understand the whole affair thoroughly, I must tell you the story the old man told to me.

"When Philip Van Rensselaer came to Sandy Creek, about twenty-five years ago, the advent of the young and handsome New Yorker made quite a little sensation in the quiet country village. All the pretty girls instantly attempted to captivate the stranger. But to two only of the village beauties did he seem at all partial. And these two were Sarah and Amanda Gordon. The two girls were cousins. The old fellow from whom I got these particulars was Amanda's brother.

"Sarah Gordon won the New Yorker, and they were married. Naturally the disappointed maiden, Amanda—or 'Mandy,' as the old fellow called her—was not over and above pleased at this result, although she did not openly betray her feelings, and seemed to be just as much attached to her cousin, now the wife of Philip Van Rensselaer, as before.

"Well, six or seven months after the marriage took place, Van Rensselaer returned to New York. A few months after that, Sarah, his wife, gave birth to a female child and died. That child was the heir you are in search of, Alice Gordon Van Rensselaer."

"Yes, these facts I discovered three years ago when I went to Sandy Creek, but the rivalry between the two cousins is something new to me," Keene said.

"That's the point upon which the whole affair hinges, as you will see in a moment," Cranshaw observed. "After the death of the mother, a friend of the family, named Hartright, went to New York after Van Rensselaer. What took place between him and Van Rensselaer no one knows, as Hartright kept his own counsel. He persuaded Amanda Gordon to take charge of the child, and paid her regularly so much per month for her trouble. Of course everybody who knew any thing about the affair imagined that the money for the support of the child came from the father.

"When the child was about five years old, the guardian, Hartright, went off to India. Then Amanda Gordon married. Her marriage was an unhappy one, and in about six months' time she ran away from her husband and came to New York, bringing the child, Alice, with her. She changed her name, and only one person in the world knew where she was, her brother. She acted in this way because her husband, who was a brutal, violent fellow, had often threatened to kill her if she left him, and she was afraid that he would be as good as his word if he succeeded in discovering her whereabouts. She had another motive, too, in disguising her identity. She had not forgiven Philip Van Rensselaer.

laer for preferring her cousin to herself, and she revenged herself for the slight by carrying off the child. But, from all I can learn in relation to the affair, old Van Rensselaer seemed to care very little whether the child was living or dead; at all events, he never troubled himself enough to either come to Sandy Creek, or to send any one to inquire after the child. When Hart-right returned from India he found the girl and woman both were gone. The brother, who was the only one who really did know any thing about the affair, pretended to be in utter ignorance as to where his sister was. This was her idea, you see, so that Van Rensselaer shouldn't find the child."

"But where is she now?"

"That's what we've got to find out. For twelve years the old man hasn't heard a word from his sister, and said that he thought that she must be dead."

"But did you get any clue which we can work up?" Keene inquired, anxiously.

"Yes. I found out the name of the woman with whom Amanda Gordon or Betts—Betts was her husband's name—lived in New York. By just another of one of those strange accidents, you know, which some people would call luck, the woman is an old acquaintance of mine, Eliza Keed, or 'Liza' Keed, as the Baxter street rounders call her. I know her well; a gal that used to live with her, called Jennie, married 'Denny' King—But I forgot, you ain't so well posted in ward politics as I am."

"Married a girl that used to live with her?" said Keene, thoughtfully; "suppose this girl, Jennie, should be the heiress?"

"Maybe; it would be a precious windfall for Denny."

"We had better hunt the woman up as soon as possible."

"Yes, I know where her crib is; no use of going there, though, before ten. She's a late bird, and don't rise early."

"Let's get some breakfast, and afterwards we can go down-town and interview 'Liza,'" Keene said.

Breakfast over, the two sauntered slowly down-town, and about half-past nine found themselves in Baxter street.

Cranshaw stopped before a miserable-looking little two-story house.

"This is the ranch," he said. "This woman used to deal a little in stolen goods. I don't know whether she's got out of her old tricks or not."

In response to the detective's knock, a sharp-faced, wrinkled-up old woman, in a loose, dirty gown, appeared at the door. A scowl came over her face when she beheld the detective.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Keed," said Cranshaw, blandly, never noticing the threatening scowl. "I want to see you on a little business this morning—nothing professional," he added, hastily, as he saw the scowl deepen on the old woman's face. "I'm in search of a little information concerning a woman who used to live with you some ten or twelve years ago. She rented rooms in your house, I guess."

"Good many women have rented rooms of me in the last ten years," she said, ruffly.

"Yes, of course; this woman I speak of rented rooms of you when you had your house in Bayard street. A woman from the country, with a little girl; a young woman, and rather good-looking, except that she had reddish hair."

"Yes, I know," the old woman said.

"You remember her, then?"

"Yes, I don't often forget nobody, not even you, Mister Detective," she replied, coarsely, and with malice in her voice.

"Now, 'Liza Jane, don't you get your back up," said the detective, jocosely. "I want a little information out of you and you're going to give it to me."

"Well, now don't you be too sure of that!" exclaimed the old woman, placing her hands upon her hips, defiantly. "I ain't over and above in love with you, now I can tell you."

"Now, Mrs. Keed, don't let your angry passions rise. I may be able to do you a good turn one of these days. You know the best of people get into trouble sometimes. It might kinder worry you if I were to put a man in front of the house and keep him there night and day for the next week or two; it might frighten some of your visitors away."

The woman glared at the detective for a moment, but made no answer.

"Now don't be a fool; I only want a little information. It don't concern you in the least. You see I want to know what has become of the child that the woman had."

"The woman's dead," the old hag said, suddenly.

"Yes, I guessed as much," the detective replied; "don't care anything about her; I want the child."

"She's a woman now."

"Yes, I know that."

"Is it going to do her any good?" the woman asked, thoughtfully.

"Yes, I think that I can put a good lump of money in her way."

"Well, come in and I'll tell you all I know," the woman said, opening the door, and changing her tone wonderfully.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LAST WILL.

THE two detectives followed the old woman into the house and sat down in the front room.

"If you find the girl then it will be a good thing for her?" the old woman queried.

"Yes," Cranshaw replied.

"Well, I know all about it, because when the woman died I took the girl and took care of her until she went and got married."

"Oh, she is married then?" Keene asked, watching the face of the woman intently.

"Yes; gals will do such things, you know," she said, with a chuckle.

"Is she in New York now?" Cranshaw asked.

"Yes."

"Can you tell us where we can find her?"

"Of course I can; she married a man called Denny King."

Keene looked a little disappointed.

"You are sure that this is the child of the woman?"

"Her name was Gordon," said the old woman, suddenly; "that was her maiden name. She was married, but she didn't go by her husband's name."

"That is correct," Keene said. "Did she call herself Gordon?"

"No."

"Is that it?" Keene took an old envelope from his pocket and penciled a name upon it, then handed it to the old woman.

"Yes," she replied, promptly, the moment she read the name.

"Well, that's all we want to know," Keene said, rising.

"Do you know where to find Jennie?" the old woman asked.

"Oh, yes," Keene answered, quickly.

Then the two left the house.

"Well, Jennie is the heir after all," Cranshaw said.

"So the old woman says," Keene replied.

"I know exactly where to put my hands on the girl. She's in John Allen's dance-house, in Water street. Her husband's up on the Island. Shall we go over to the dance-house?"

"No hurry about it," Keene said, carelessly. "I guess the girl will keep."

Cranshaw looked at Keene in astonishment; he did not understand why he had so suddenly slacked in the chase.

"That old woman is pretty sharp," Keene said, after a pause.

"Yes; in the old time she was more bother to the police than any other receiver of stolen property in the city."

"Pretty sharp," Keene repeated, slowly, "but I rather think she won't pull the wool over my eyes, much."

Cranshaw did not exactly understand Keene's meaning, but he held his peace and said nothing.

Van Rensselaer sat in his library, surrounded by the morning papers.

The blow had fallen. Each journal contained a full account of the descent on the gaming-house, and he saw his well-known name paraded as the proprietor. The pungent allusion to himself in the articles made him wince with pain. The lash was applied without mercy.

"The cursed hounds!" Van Rensselaer muttered, in rage, rising and pacing up and down the floor and vainly endeavoring to still the passion that was swelling in his soul.

There was a tap at the door and Clara entered.

Her eyes instantly fell upon the papers scattered carelessly about the room.

"Oh, you've seen it then?" she said.

"Seen what?" he asked, in irritation.

"Why, that dreadful article about you."

"Oh, yes, I've seen it," he replied, bitterly.

"Isn't it dreadful? I should think that they would be ashamed to print such things."

"They'll print any thing to sell their papers, and it doesn't make much difference whether it's true or false."

"What are you going to do about it, David?"

"I can tell better when I've thought the affair over and seen my lawyer."

"Everybody in the neighborhood knows all about it," she said, with a wry face.

"How do you know that?" he demanded, pausing suddenly in his walk.

"Why, I've had three visitors already, and they all wanted to know if I had seen that dreadful story in the newspapers. Of course they all declared that it was perfectly shameful for the nasty newspapers to publish such a horrid story, and that they didn't believe a word of it; but I know they did, David, and they only came out of spite and envy."

"I wonder what effect it will produce on Lawrence?" David said, suddenly.

"That's what I've been thinking about ever since I read about the horrid affair."

"He may take it into his head to back out of his engagement with you."

"Why that would be perfectly dreadful!" exclaimed Clara, in horror.

"Don't be alarmed, sister; I think I shall be able to hold him to his promise. I shall try the experiment."

"That's right. He promised to call this evening."

"I will receive him; leave it all to me."

"Very well; I sha'n't go out to-day, for I know how the people will look at me."

Clara left the room.

David ordered his carriage, drove down to his lawyer and had a long and not very satisfactory interview with him. The lawyer counseled moderation, while Van Rensselaer wished to take instant action.

Eight o'clock in the evening found Van Rensselaer pacing restless as a caged tiger up and down his library floor.

"I would almost be willing to give half my fortune to strike one good blow at this man," he murmured; he referred to Royal Keene. "He must be got out of the way, but how?"

Van Rensselaer pondered on the difficult question.

A servant entered with a message that a Mr. Abrams wished to speak with him upon important business.

"Show him in here," Van Rensselaer said; "I wonder what he wants with me?" he questioned, after the servant had left the room. "Some wonderful diamonds to sell cheap, I suppose, or some other nonsense of that sort. I am in little humor to-night to be worried."

The servant put an end to Van Rensselaer's surmises by showing Abrams into the room.

"Good-evening, Mister Von Rensselaer," the old Jew said in his usual oily way.

"Good-evening, sir."

"I hope you ish well?"

"Yes, sir, quite well."

"I hafe a leetle business to do mit you," and the broker rubbed his hands together softly.

"Isn't it rather an odd time for business, Mr. Abrams?" the young man said, coldly. He was not in the best of humor, and he rather resented the Jew's visit.

"For bisness like mine all times is de goo time, Mr. Van Rensselaer," the Jew replied.

"Well, sir, what is it?" Van Rensselaer asked, impatiently.

"I hafe got something to shell you, shell you so sheap as never vash, mine goot friend!" exclaimed the broker, enthusiastically.

"My dear sir, I do not feel in the humor to-night to buy any thing," the young man said, impatiently.

"Ah, mine gootness! you yust wait till you shall hear vat it is. I know dat we can make a trade. Oh, Moses! I hafe a wonderful bargain."

"I am sure that I do not care to buy anything, no matter what it is," persisted Van Rensselaer.

"Wat you say to your father's will, eh?" and the broker lowered his tone mysteriously as he spoke, and leered with a cunning smile into the face of Van Rensselaer.

"My father's will!" exclaimed the young man, in great astonishment.

"Dat ish true, so helps me Isaac!"

"You are in possession of my father's will?"

"No."

"How then can you sell it to me?"

"You waits yust a leetle and I tells you. Dere is a very goot friend of mine, he come to me and he says, 'Abrams, my tear, you ish an honest man.' I say, 'Yesh.' He say, 'What you then gifes me for dis paper? I look at him, and so helps me Isaac! it was your father's will.'

"Who was this person who wished to sell you the will?" David asked, unable to understand the strange affair.

"He ish a very nice young mans," the Jew said, with a cunning chuckle. "Now he calls himself James Bright; you and me knows him better ash Royal Keene."

"Ah! you recognized him, then?" Van Rensselaer exclaimed, quickly.

"Oh, I never forgets a face," and the broker shook his head, wisely.

"What did you say to him about buying this will?"

"I tolle him dat it vash no use to me. He say, 'Yesh it is; you takes dis to David Van Rensselaer and he gifis you goot price for it.' I ish an honest man, I no buy vat you call a pig in a poke. I say to him, 'You wait. I will see vat I can do. I hafe a friend who hafe got monish, I no got any. I go to him, perhaps he lend me the monish.' Den I come to you. Vat you say, you want the will, eh?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE JEW'S PLOT.

VAN RENSSLAER did not reply for a few moments. He was meditating upon the situation. It was plain to him that Keene had not succeeded in finding the heiress, else he would not have been willing to part with the precious document; but how the will had come into Keene's possession was a mystery to him. Evidently fortune had strangely befriended his foe. The will once destroyed his fortune was safe.

"Well, you buy him, eh?" Abrams asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"Dat ish goot!" exclaimed the Jew, rubbing his hands together gleefully. "I no buy him till I find out whether you take him. He no use to me."

"There is only one person in the world that

the will can benefit," David said, slowly. "That person has not been seen or heard of for years. Without that party is produced, the will is of no more value than a piece of waste paper. Keene has evidently not been able to find this person that I speak of, or he would not be willing to let the will go out of his hands."

"I understand; you buy the will only dat you may be certain."

"Yes, that is my object; but I am not willing to pay a great price for it."

"How much monish you gife, eh?" inquired the broker, stroking his beard, reflectively.

"Not over five hundred dollars."

"Dat ish a goot price; dat ish, if I had the whole of it," Abrams said, slowly. "I know!" he exclaimed, suddenly, after quite a pause. "You wants dis will destroyed, eh?"

"Yes, but I must be sure that it is destroyed," Van Rensselaer said, meaningly. "I must see it with my own eyes."

"So you shall, my tear!" exclaimed the broker. "I hafe a plan. You hates this Royal Keene?"

"Yes!" Van Rensselaer exclaimed, bitterly.

"Revenge is sweet; you like revenge, eh? I gife him to you."

"How?"
"I go to Mister Keene; I say to him: mine friend will buy the will; you come mit me in a carriage to his house. I bring him right here into this room. He carries the will in his breast-pocket," and the Jew indicated the locality by placing his hand upon it. "I hold him, you takes the will from him, put it in the gas—puff—leettle smoke—fire—will is destroyed. You gifes me five hundred dollars; you gifes Royal Keene nothing, and you hafe revenge, eh?"

Van Rensselaer had listened attentively.

"Yes, but there are some serious difficulties in the way," he said. "In the first place, he will recognize this house the moment he sees it, and even if you succeeded in getting him inside, he is not the man to allow himself to be robbed without a struggle, and a hard one, too."

"Oh, mine goot friend, you listen to me!" exclaimed the broker. "Dat poor young man is so trunk as never was. He is so intoxicated dat my heart bleeds for him."

"Drunk?"
"Yesh, if he wasn't so trunk I couldn't make five hundred dollars out of him."

"His old vice!"
"Oh, he is one walking whisky-barrel!" the Jew cried, with both hands uplifted.

"You think then that you can easily bring him here without danger of his discovering whither he is being carried?"

"Yesh, mine goot friend; I ish sure of it!"

"I accept your offer then; bring him here, place the will in my possession, and I will give you five hundred dollars."

"Dat ish a bargain!" cried Abrams. "I knew that we could make a trade."

"By the way," said Van Rensselaer, suddenly, "do you remember a certain note, purporting to be drawn by me and indorsed by Royal Keene, that you sold me about three years ago?"

"Oh, yesh—I never forgets!"
"Would you be willing to go on the witness stand and tell all you know in regard to the affair?"

"I no tell lies for anybody," replied the Jew, promptly. "You call me into court, I tells all I knows."

"That is all I want. When will you bring Keene here?"

"Right away."
"Here is the latch-key; you can let yourself in without the knowledge of the servants. Bring him in here; I will have every thing in readiness."

"Oh, it will be all right. I fix him!" And with this assurance the Jew departed.

Van Rensselaer looked around him with a smile of triumph.

"By heavens! the tide has turned!" he exclaimed. "At last the skies brighten. The will destroyed, my fortune is safe. Then by the aid of the Jew I will revive the old forgery charge, and send him, Keene, up the river to Sing Sing, where he will have plenty of time to meditate upon the folly of contending with me. I'll crush him without mercy."

The servant again interrupted Van Rensselaer's meditations by ushering Mr. Lawrence into the room.

Mr. Lawrence was a slender young gentleman, dressed in the extreme of fashion; he rejoiced in short-cut, yellow hair and extensive whiskers of the same hue. There was something about his face which reminded one of a poodle-dog's head.

Mr. Lawrence was extremely embarrassed upon beholding Van Rensselaer. Of course he was not aware that the servant had been instructed to show him into the library on purpose to meet that gentleman.

"Ah, Lawrence, good evening!" exclaimed David, grasping him cordially by the hand.

"How d'y do?" stammered that worthy gentleman, in great confusion; "I expected to see Miss Clara here."

"She's up-stairs. Dolly, let me congratulate you!" and Van Rensselaer again shook the limp

hand of the fop heartily. "There isn't a man in New York that I would sooner give Clara to than yourself."

"Yas, of course!" Lawrence wished himself a thousand miles away, for the purpose of his visit was, if possible, to induce Clara to release him from his promise.

"I suppose you read those newspaper articles to-day?" Van Rensselaer, said, carelessly.

"Yes, I read 'em—of course you know—" and Lawrence came to a dead halt, when he suddenly remembered that the articles were any thing but complimentary to his future brother-in-law.

"I intend to sue them all for libel," David said, speaking of his action as a matter of course.

"Sue 'em for libel!" stammered Lawrence, in utter astonishment, open-mouthed with wonder.

"Why I thought that the reports were true!" Then, as he saw the cloud gather on Van Rensselaer's brow, he suddenly concluded that he had made a rather awkward mistake.

"No, I don't mean that," he stammered; "I mean that—of course I—you know—I—" and then he broke down, helplessly.

"Yes, I've instructed my lawyer to bring suits against all of them. These newspaper fellows get very insolent sometimes. I'm going to teach them a lesson. A libel suit costs money, you know. When they find that I am really in earnest, the chances are ten to one that they will be glad to retract."

"Yas, of course; I suppose that you know all about it, but it always seemed to me that fighting a newspaper was a great deal like fighting a nest of bumblebees; the longer you fight the more you get stung, and when you succeed in capturing one, and go to close your hand upon it, you find that it isn't there."

This was quite a long speech for Lawrence to make, for ideas were never over and above plenty with him.

"I shall punish them for their insolence," Van Rensselaer said, sternly. "It is all well enough for them to print their lies about common people, but when they come to us of the avenue it is about time to put a stop to it."

"Yas, but it always seemed to me that they rather delighted in a jolly good row, and when a fellar defies them, it's like shaking a red flag in the face of an angry bull."

"Not a bad simile, Lawrence," Van Rensselaer said, laughing. "But, I won't detain you any longer; you'll find Clara up-stairs. She seems quite cut up about this unfortunate affair. If I were you, I should go up and comfort her. I suppose, of course, that this affair will make no difference with your engagement to my sister!"

Van Rensselaer's voice was smooth and gentle, but there was a certain tone in it that sounded unpleasant to the ears of Lawrence.

Mentally—in his mind's eye—Lawrence calculated the consequences of a "breaking off" with Clara—a suit for breach of promise—a history of the affair with ugly portraits of himself in all the illustrated papers. He shuddered at the very thought.

Better the marriage than the lawsuit; of two evils, etc.

"Of course not—couldn't think of such a thing, you know; by-by," and Lawrence, in great tremor, bowed himself out, leaving the keen-witted, clear-headed Van Rensselaer to laugh over the success of his plan.

CHAPTER XXVII. THE LAST STROKE.

"FORTUNE is indeed smiling upon me!" Van Rensselaer exclaimed, in triumph. Then he took a little vial from his pocket and held it up to the light. "And I had provided myself with this, too, as a refuge from the disgrace of a prison. Rather death from the contents of this harmless-looking little object than live to meet the triumphant jeers of that villain Keene. But, since affairs look so well, I do not think that I shall need this little friend."

He replaced the poison in his vest pocket, sat down and rested his head upon his hand in meditation.

Time passed rapidly on.

At last he was disturbed in his meditation by the sound of heavy footsteps in the hall, and the voice of Abrams came to his ears.

"It must be the Jew and Keene!" he muttered, springing to his feet. He opened the door to give them entrance, concealing himself behind it until they had passed into the room.

Abrams supported the staggering form of Keene into the room, and taxed all his efforts to keep that gentleman upon his legs, and to prevent him from disturbing the house with his drunken yells.

"Hic—where am I—you old scoundrel?" Keene cried, boisterously, with a thickened utterance.

"Hush, my tear," said the Jew, soothingly.

"Where have you—hic—brought me to, anyway? Who's—hic—the proprietor of this ranche?"

"Don't make so much noise; you got the will, eh?"

"Course I have—hic—right here—in my breast-pocket," Keene answered.

Then, with a sudden motion, Abrams slipped his arms under Keene's, forcing them behind his back and holding him in a vise-like grip.

"Now then, my tear!" the Jew cried, to Van Rensselaer.

Quick as a hawk, darting on its prey, Van Rensselaer sprung forward and tore the will from Keene's pocket; then he thrust it into the flame of the gas with a loud, triumphant laugh.

Keene for a moment glared around him in helpless astonishment; and then, as if suddenly realizing that he had been entrapped and the precious paper stolen from him, attempted to free himself, but the Jew held him with a grip of iron.

"Aha, Royal Keene, the will is mine!" Van Rensselaer cried, as the paper crackled and blazed in the flame of the gas.

"Have I—hic—been betrayed?" Keene stammered, in drunken amazement.

"Yes, into my hands!" Van Rensselaer replied, in triumph. "See this precious paper—the will which was to rob me of half my fortune—the flame is reducing it to powder! There!" and he cast the burning fragment from him into the grate, "now it is ashes; all claim of Alice Van Rensselaer to my father's estate is gone. Even if the heir is living, and you can find her, it will avail you nothing."

Van Rensselaer's voice swelled loud in triumph, and with a defiant face he gazed upon his foe.

Suddenly a marvelous change came over Keene; the stolid, drunken face lost its vacant look. With apparent ease he shook himself loose from the hold of the Jew and burst into a ringing laugh.

Van Rensselaer started in amazement, and Abrams prudently took refuge behind a table, with his heavy cane poised in his hand as if he feared an attack.

"David Van Rensselaer, that will gave you and your sister fifty thousand dollars!" Keene cried; "without it you can not inherit a single penny of your father's property. You have fallen into the trap that I have laid for you, and with your own hand beggared both yourself and sister!"

Van Rensselaer could hardly believe his own hearing.

"You are mad!" he cried.

"Am I?" exclaimed Keene, scurifuly. "Is it not strange then that the madman has so completely beaten you at your own game and with your own weapon? I wished by your own act that you should destroy your fortune. Abrams is my confederate. There is a little fact connected with your father's two marriages which I do not think you are aware of. Just listen to me for a few moments and you shall see how utterly you have ruined yourself by destroying that will."

Van Rensselaer gazed upon Keene in sullen defiance. He could not guess what revelation was coming; nor could he conceive how his action in destroying the will could possibly work to his disadvantage, yet from Keene's triumphant words and manner he guessed that the coming blow was no light stroke.

"Your father, Philip Van Rensselaer, married his first wife, Sarah Gordon, in the village of Sandy Creek, New York, on the 12th of November, 1842. She died in that self-same village, on the 10th of January, 1844. He married your mother, Clara Brevoort, in the city of New York, on the 8th of January, 1844—just two days before his first wife died."

Van Rensselaer started, and the blood came to his lip, where the white teeth, convulsively clenched together, had pierced the flesh. Keene's words had cut the ground away beneath his feet. If Keene spoke the truth—and a sickening sensation at his heart convinced Van Rensselaer that he had—both himself and sister were, indeed, beggars.

Keene mercilessly enjoyed the agony so plainly apparent upon Van Rensselaer's face.

"The second marriage being contracted while the first wife was living," Keene continued, "is void—illegal. Both you and your sister, the issue of that marriage, are illegitimate, and without the will—which your own hand, remember, gave to the flames—you can not inherit a single penny of your father's property. All goes to the child by his first wife—Alice Gordon Van Rensselaer."

"But that child—you can not produce her—she is not living!" Van Rensselaer gasped.

"You are wrong," replied Keene, coolly; "the heir is living, and I can produce her. She was given to a woman named Gordon to bring up. She married, fled to New York, changed her name, and thus for a time baffled all efforts to find her. But, at last, the heir has come to light. Link by link have I forged the chain of evidence which will prove her identity beyond the shadow of a doubt. Even now the lost heir is near at hand. You shall see her and the witnesses who can prove her rights."

Keene strode to the door and flung it open. Hartright and the detective, Cranshaw, conducted a vailed lady into the room. Keene raised the vail, and Van Rensselaer, to his utter astonishment, beheld the face of Coralie York.

The young actress—the child of the streets,

Sue, the Orange Girl—was, indeed, the lost heir, Alice Gordon Van Rensselaer.

In the interview with the woman, Keed, Keene had formed a suspicion that she was deceiving him by substituting the girl, whose whereabouts she did know, for the one whom she had lost sight of. And when he wrote the name of Wilson down on the envelope, and the old woman unhesitatingly pronounced it to be the name of the woman who cared for the child, from what Coralie had told him of her life, he saw at once that she must be the heiress.

Van Rensselaer gazed for a moment into the face of Alice, then cast a rapid glance at Hartright. He realized that the game was lost. He quietly folded his arms over his breast but said nothing.

"You are satisfied that I have spoken the truth?" Keene asked.

Van Rensselaer bowed his head, silently.

"Oblige me all by retiring," Keene said.

Silently they quitted the room, leaving Keene and Van Rensselaer alone. Keene closed the door, leaned against it, and addressed the other.

"David Van Rensselaer, I swore once that I would hunt you down until you stood upon the scaffold, but another will stays my hand. You are beaten to the earth in a fair fight. Bishop, your tool, was my man, a detective officer. I personated the Indian in the dance-house, also the Englishman in the gaming den. Alice is my betrothed wife; she bids me to spare you. She is more merciful than I. All she asks is the one-half of the estate bequeathed to her by the will. The rest she gives freely to Clara and yourself."

Van Rensselaer's lip quivered; for the first time since the crowning blow his face softened.

"Give to Clara what you like," he said, quickly; "all I ask for myself is a few hundred dollars to pay my passage to some foreign land, where, under another name, I can lead a new life. I thank both you and Alice for your mercy, and I hope that the money will bring more happiness to you than it has to me."

The division of the estate was made very quietly. No one in New York but those immediately concerned in the affair knew aught of it.

David Van Rensselaer disappeared very suddenly, no one knew where. He was never seen in New York again. Gotham had lost a son, and the empire of Brazil gained a subject.

Coralie and Keene were married. In their case true love at last ran smooth.

Hartright returned to his mystic India; the savant, after seeing his beloved Alice happily married, had no longer a motive for remaining away from his adopted land.

Joe Oward still writes sensation articles; he has married the pretty Katie, and Mademoiselle Heloise no longer delights the patrons of the ballet.

Clara became Mrs. Lawrence, and is reported to have the finest diamonds in New York.

Jennie, the dance-house siren, was struck down by her brutal husband in a drunken fit. She never recovered from the effects of the blow.

Sunshine to all but one of the girls, surnamed "The Witches of New York."

THE END.

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